



This is *not* a moonlight bathing picnic in Malta, but a jolly afternoon one.

MEDITERRANEAN MEMORIES

by

Major S. E. G. Ponder

Author of

"In Asia's Arms", "Soldier in the Sun"

"Sun on Summer Seas"

etc.

WITH 22 HALF TONE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND A MAP



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To
MRS. H. CAMERON-BINGHAM
IN MEMORY OF THOSE HAPPY HOURS IN ANGUS
Friendly disagreement often leads to added knowledge

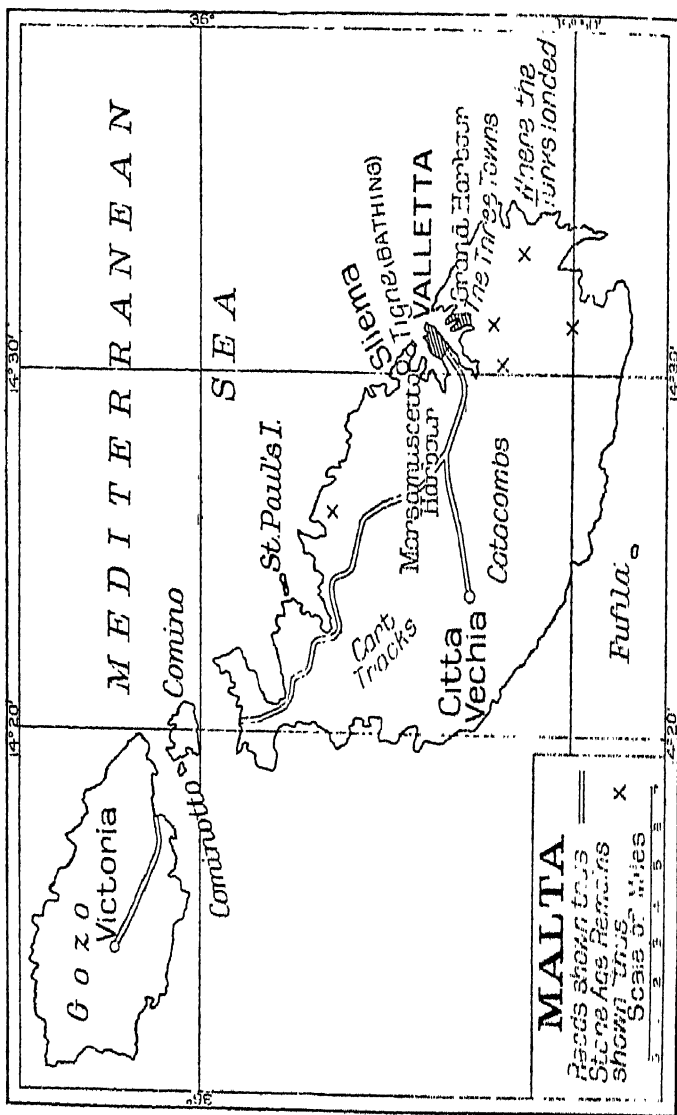
*To observe is one thing,
To pass judgment another.*

FOREWORD

COMMENTS in this book are fair and entirely without prejudice. I do not mean anything other than what I have said.

I have spoken of affairs as they appear to me, but it must be remembered that the views expressed are my own, and must be taken as such.

If I occasionally appear unkind it is because of truth, rather than malice.



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Mediterranean Memories

CHAPTER I

SALISBURY PLAIN

I

OVERLOOKING a tiny Wiltshire village, the camp was drowsy in the late July afternoon. An air of peace hung over the hundreds of white tents which dotted the hillside like monstrous toadstools. Beyond the roadway and high hedge, the smooth, green, undulating slopes of Salisbury Plain stretched away like waves of an uneasy sea, and the unbroken miles faded into the blue of the horizon.

A breeze, growing stronger every moment, came out of the west, and sped on its way to where, over distant Devizes, great masses of white cloud slid up into the pale blue of the sky. Before the night was over there would be a thunder-storm.

To the left, the ground ran steeply downwards to a thick hedge, out of which sprang numerous tall and aged trees. Through the gaps between the trunks, portions of roofs, red and mellowed with

age, could be seen ; and in the hedge itself an agitated thrush hysterically proclaimed the presence of a prowling thief, a village cat.

Out of the lazy stillness came the sound of a barking dog, and the voices of a few villagers rose up soft and indistinct. The dying day was sinking gracefully into the oblivion of night. Tomorrow, motor-cars, and strange, evil-smelling mechanical monsters, will spring into action once again ; guns will boom, and shells tear up the distant landscape, for this is an artillery camp. Brought into being each year during the summer months, brigades of artillery come here from all over southern England, to manœuvre their vehicles and to fire their guns.

I had performed the duties of midwife to this camp at its birth in late April. I had seen the tents, large and small, spring up from the bare grass ; I had nursed and guided and chided it when, week after week, the brigades had arrived and departed ; and each in turn had looked to me for information, comfort, and guidance where the camp itself was concerned.

My work revolved about the issuing of orders regarding the allotment of sites, sanitation, the complete cleanliness of the area, the provision of a constant supply of hot water, and the administration of the various canteens.

One of the more important, however, of my func-

tions was the housing and general personal comfort of the many Lordly Ones who came and went. These beings, at this time of the year, descend from more rarefied atmospheres to twist the tails of the naughty batteries who fail to drop their shells upon deceitful and cunningly hidden targets. Should my arrangements for the ease of these Great Ones go awry, then, because for all their glory they were very human, the brigades suffered. Should, for example, the batmen, provided for them by myself, fail to wake them in the morning at the proper hour ; forget, spill, or otherwise neglect their steaming cups of tea, and boiling shaving-water, then these Lordly Ones arose in wrath and gloom, sallying forth with claws unsheathed. One of my additional duties was that of shepherding distinguished visitors, who now and again appeared to watch the brigades in action. Generally they were easy to handle, being amiable and blissfully ignorant of what was being shown to them. One of these visitors was, however, a very different proposition.

A brigadier sent for me to come to his office one morning, and there he told me that the German Military Attaché was coming down to visit the camp, and that I was to do "bear leader" to him. I protested that I could not speak conversational German, but the brigadier waved this aside as unimportant, the Attaché apparently speaking a

little English. I departed, knowing that I was due for a difficult morning ; how difficult I was to learn later on.

The Personage arrived, in due course, in a huge car driven by a very Germanic chauffeur, who leapt from his seat and flung open the door. I greeted our guest, who was a large, youngish person with a naughty twinkle in his eye. He was dressed in the usual field-grey uniform, and hung about with gold lace, swords, and strange-looking medals, and his name was what the Americans so graphically describe as "a mouthful".

I took him into the mess tent and there introduced him to several Lordly Ones, and I found that, thanks to secret practice, I had not a great deal of difficulty with his string of titles. We went outside again and I was invited to enter the car. We then set out on our long and bumpy ride across the Plain, to where a battery was in action, awaiting our coming.

I made conversation ; desperately I made it, and in English. I learned that the Attaché had risen from his bed in London at 6 a.m. that morning, after a very hectic party, and that he had slept for most of the long drive. He also complained of a headache, to which I replied in understanding and sympathetic tones. It was at this point that my guest became gracious and friendly—I think he

was a little hurt at first that I was so junior in rank—and before I knew where we were we had become friends, and all because we agreed upon how much we disliked certain other countries in Europe. Fortunately I am fond of the Germans and their charming country, and so was not forced to lie.

On arriving at a battery, I led the Attaché to the guns and showed him as much as I could. The gunners waiting on the guns eyed us with a rapt and fascinated gaze. We then departed for the Observation Post (O.P.). Here my guest was taken over by several Lordly Ones, but every now and again he came back to me: he was feeling a little lost, and also desired to be informed on what was about to take place. As I was not quite sure myself, I had to use my imagination. Guns then fired, and their shells burst on a near-by hillside, but unfortunately nowhere near where I had said they would. This may have been because of my poor grasp of what was going on, or to bad shooting on the battery's part—which it was I never learned.

A chill wind was blowing: a wind such as you can get on the Plain, and one which entirely ignored all clothes and searched out your very marrow. Trying to keep as far away from the senior officers as possible, I took shelter behind a tin shed and gossiped with several brother officers; but yet more "Great Ones" joined us, and I had to

come forward and introduce our guest. The generals, I was glad to hear, were no better at talking to distinguished visitors than I was. They slapped their field-boots with their sticks, and uttered throaty "haw-haws" as they sought to make elegant conversation. I smiled in the background.

As is often the case on such occasions, things came to an abrupt conclusion, and we all hopped into our cars and went off to witness another form of artillery expression. This turned out to be an O.P. on the front edge of a small wood. Here the German Military Attaché and I stood and tried not to get in the way of nervous and agitated artillery majors, who uttered strange cries at intervals and spoke pleadingly and then blasphemously into telephones. Signallers with yards of devilishly minded wire appeared on the scene and complicated matters. One by one the generals arrived, but they sat aloof on shooting-sticks and surreptitiously ate sandwiches out of tiny paper packages, none of which was offered to my guest or myself ; but he, fortunately, said he was not hungry.

When none of us spectators was expecting it, one of the majors cried "Fire !" in a loud voice, and we were all galvanized into action. The Lordly Ones bolted their mouthfuls of sandwich, and I tried to explain to the Attaché where the shells would hit the ground. This time I actually did

not know what the target was. Distant guns boomed, and we all leaned forward to see the shells burst close to the targets amid clouds of dust and earth clods. We waited, and still we waited, but the landscape kept its quiet, undisturbed serenity. An air of tension grew up and became stronger the longer we waited. Someone then pointed to where, a considerable distance from the targets, there were several thin wisps of smoke and dust rising up from behind a crest. I hasten over what followed. The Lordly Ones scowled, the artillery major became puce in the face with rage and mortification, whilst I, gently but firmly, plucked my Attaché from off the scene and led him away. He tactfully did not ask me for an explanation, but a broad, boyish grin spread over his face as we made for the car.

There was still a considerable length of time before I could direct our steps towards the mess in the camp, and I wracked my brains for a solution as to what to do to interest my charge. I refused to take him back to an empty mess and talk to him—that would have needed an effort beyond my powers, and we had seen quite enough of guns.

When becoming desperate, a captive balloon, towed by a motor-wagon, appeared on the horizon. I had that balloon brought down to the ground, and I bundled my Attaché, complete with parachute,

into the basket and sent him aloft. Watching the balloon turning and swinging in the breeze, I hoped my guest would not be sick, but I really did not care very much—I was beyond that, and only desired to be given a few moments' mental freedom.

During that morning I would have given a great deal to have been able to chatter small talk, in the same manner as some young women I know can do, for when compelled to make conversation my mind becomes as void of topics as a desert is of trees.

On his reappearance from the upper air, my Attaché expressed himself as enthralled and charmed by his experience, and stated that he did not feel in the least sick. There now being nothing else to do, we were forced to return to the mess. I will not expand on the two hours of mental strain that followed ; but all things must come to an end. The German Military Attaché departed with many kind expressions of thanks, and I went to my hut and slept until tea-time.

It was, however, an easy and pleasant existence in the camp where everyone was grateful for my efforts on their behalf, and life ran smoothly. The camp regimental-sergeant-major was my right-hand man and he was a superlatively efficient person who goaded me on with many a subtle suggestion. Nothing in or about the camp missed his

hawk-like eye, and he spent much of his time hunting harassed sanitary squads, for whom he made life less pleasant than they had hoped.

I had but to murmur some trivial order to him for things to take place with disconcerting speed. Men who normally walked upon their legitimate occasions, now fled before his imperious orders. When this, or that, did not meet with my approval it was woe to those untidy children, officers' batmen, who scattered litter about their tents ; or unhappiness to those whose work it was to destroy by burning the astonishing quantities of refuse ; and, finally, the grossest personalities to him who failed instantly to produce hot water for the bodily comfort of all officers and men.

On one occasion only did I speak hard words to my paragon of a sergeant-major, and it came about in this manner. Each fresh brigade of artillery carried out the firing of its guns under the orders of some particular general. These generals, brigadiers, or full colonels, were assisted by officers known as brigade majors, who in turn were helped by chief clerks, whose duty it was to see that the numerous orders, which fell from the lips of the Great One, were suitably put on to paper in the form of orders, and distributed to those who had to carry them out.

One morning, when feeling somewhat part-worn

after a heavy guest night, I went to my office. Here the R.S.M. knocked on the door and was told to come in, whereupon he baldly stated that he had placed the chief clerk of a certain brigadier under arrest. Now this was the most tactless thing for my R.S.M. to have done, because it meant that the Lordly One's staff would become badly disorganized. Such people have the most rooted objections to being disturbed in their holy calm by those beneath them ; when so treated they speak their minds, and I felt unhappy, knowing that I should have to face the coming storm.

In that bare office, with the R.S.M. standing as stiff as a poker before my table, I said what was in my mind. I stated, among other things, that he should have come to me for my orders on the subject before taking action of this kind. He listened to my raging tones in a rigid and a stony silence.

"I think you are a tactless ass," I ended up.

"Excuse me, sir." The R.S.M.'s voice was hoarse with outraged and pained indignation. "The brigade major himself told me to place his clerk under arrest."

I listened, and was confounded. Then I laughed.

"Why didn't you say so at first?" I demanded. The R.S.M. did not reply, so I laughed again



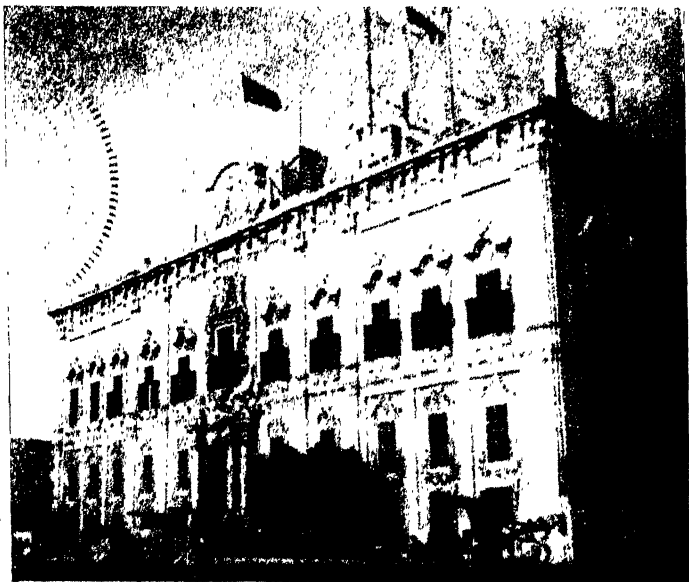
A winter sea off Malta. The aftermath of a gregale.



In the far distance is St. Paul's Island. It was in the channel between this island and the mainland that St. Paul's ship was wrecked.



A typical street scene in Valletta.



The Auberge de Castile. The most modern and ornate of all the auberges.

and told him he had deserved his ticking-off for grossly misleading me with his first remark. For quite a week it was made clear to me how respectfully pained and indignant was my excellent R.S.M.

II

When the day's work was over and the red flags on the ranges hauled down, I would mount my horse and ride over the coarse grasses, all gaily patterned with flowers, where my ancestors had tended their flocks and lived their simple, uncomplicated existences. Salisbury Plain is so drenched in the lore of our race that their presence can be felt even today by the favoured few. To many, however, this Plain is a solitude, and they cringe before its primitive strength as they would before a stern father.

With me came Peter, my large, white bull-terrier who, like most of his breed, had plenty of character and was a well of original sin. After the comparative confinement of a large garrison town, the open spaces were to him a never-ending source of joy. He could never keep up with my horse if it was moving at any pace more rapid than a walk, but, jogging along well in rear, his tongue lolling out, he would catch me up when I waited for him. Every breeze, however, brought some

tantalizing scent to his twitching nostrils, and each just had to be investigated, with the result that he covered twice the distance I did. Then there were the rabbits—hundreds of them. But Peter, for all his four months on the Plain, never really learned to distinguish them from cats. He would run into a rabbit hiding in a tuft of grass. Darting forward, he would stop bewildered, for the rabbit, having departed in haste, was not there, and Peter never knew in which direction it had gone. He always expected the beast to wait for him as did most of the cats he hunted in the village.

Cats to Peter were as gold to men ; apart from his food, myself, and a private hate or two, he thought about nothing else ; but, in spite of this, I only once knew him to get a mouthful of cat-fur, and this was by accident. If a cat turned on him he would retreat in undignified haste, and I have seen a cat chase him, inflicting a slashing attack on his hindquarters, a fact which he did not fail to proclaim to the world.

Up the long, gently curving valleys, and across the swelling ridges, over the coarse, flower-bespan-gled grasses, with a clear sky above and a wonderful soft green solitude about me, the horse would play with his bit. He daintily picked his way, waiting until I should give the signal which meant we would run for a mile or so, he revelling in the pleasures of

movement, and I with wind in my hair and joy in my heart. Peter never thought this quite fair.

In the sunset the three of us returned to where, in the uppermost of two long tin huts which clung to the steep sides of a slope, I lived, and shared with Peter a room the size of an ordinary bath-room. It was one of six rooms, each of which was divided from the other by a thin partition and allotted to visiting generals and colonels. When I first arrived at the camp my room had been as bare as it was unlovely ; and so, knowing I should have to live and wash in this room for four months, I had a suite of furniture sent out from Salisbury. It was a lasting joy that each night I retired to a comfortable bed, whilst the visiting Lordly Ones on either side of me groaned uneasily upon their hard, unyielding camp-beds, and washed out of a bowl the size of a pudding-basin. Speaking of groaning reminds me how, because of the thinness of the partitions, every movement made by my neighbours was audible in no uncertain manner, for the walls were sounding-boards.

From experience in that room I have come to the conclusion that all the Lordly Ones snore ; the more Lordly they are the louder they snore. Never gentlemanly purring, but fog-horn snores which shook not only their beds, but my own as well. I soon grew used to it, but not so Peter, who

thought it was some enemy making insulting remarks to him, and as each visitor used a different key he never became properly reconciled, and protested at intervals during the night.

My room in summer was an oven, and on rainy, windy days it became a playground for every draught, which indulged in touch-and-run with all portions of my shuddering person. A corridor ran the whole length of the building, and at one end my batman shared a room with another batman and two young Golden Cocker spaniels. These spaniels belonged to a brother officer, and had been brought to the camp by myself in the hope of selling them to a Territorial officer. Adorable creatures, they were sisters, who worshipped my batman and hated each other with a bitter loathing. Never have I seen two puppies who displayed such sudden and quite ferocious fits of temper towards each other, and this was made the more noticeable by the fact that, normally, they were most amiable and affectionate towards me and other human beings.

Peter, the bull-terrier, just tolerated them, and when they crawled all over him in my room, or licked his face, he would turn his huge white head away with an air of intolerable boredom, and by pathetic glances in my direction showed that he only endured these attentions because he knew that

I expected it of him. When things became too much to be borne he would heave himself to his feet and go off and search for the mess cat, who lived in the kitchen and sought refuge under it when Peter hove into sight. Peter hunted the cat, the cat hunted the thrush in the near-by hedge, and the thrush hunted the wily worm ; what the worm hunted I do not know, but that sequence of events took place each day.

Life in our huge tented mess was a never-ending source of interest and fascination for me. The brigades of artillery, who came to fire their guns, were mainly Territorial ones, each remaining a fortnight, and there were always two brigades present, one arriving and one departing each week-end. As they came from places as far apart as Eastbourne and Grimsby, their officers had varied civil occupations. There were lawyers, doctors, engineers, bankers, sons of industrial magnates, landed gentry, and owners of fleets of trawlers.

At dinner I might find myself, for example, sitting between a stockbroker and a baronet, and in consequence I learned many new things. The art that lay behind the successful direction of a lightning-conductor ; how to manage the captains of trawlers, who, by the way, appear to be tiresome people, needing great tact and understanding if the

fleet is to work smoothly ; and I also learned a little from peeps behind the scenes of the currency mystery.

At the long dinner-table (made up of a succession of small ones) there would often be as many as sixty or seventy officers, hardly one of whom resembled the other. There were long, lean, tall, fat, short, elderly, young, and middle-aged officers. Officers who laughed, those who scowled (these were generally they who had fallen foul, during the day, of some livery brigadier); those who found life hard and difficult, and, finally, those who cared not a cuss for man or beast.

After dinner was over we all gathered in the two ante-rooms, where we played bridge, wrote letters, or just talked. But each week the departing brigade gave a guest night, when even the grave seniors made whoopee. On such nights the waiters would remove all easily breakable furniture from the ante-room, because you could never tell in what direction fun, after dinner, would take. One year a certain brigade in a frenzy of high spirits took all the ante-room furniture outside, made a huge bonfire and solemnly set light to it. When presented, in due course, with a bill for sixty pounds, the colonel of the brigade expressed surprise at its smallness, saying that his officers usually expected to pay five pounds each for their guest-night fun.

Flushed with wine and good food, we would, on a guest night, troop out from dinner and the fun began. It generally started with someone sitting down at the shamefully ill-used mess piano and playing some low drinking-song. In no time at all the still night air would tremble, scandalized, as song followed song, each growing more lewd than the last. When the songs, or our voices, gave out, there would be cock-fighting, or polo, or steeple-chasing, and much beer. Then the young subalterns would be made to go outside, climb the steep slippery roof of the tent, force their protesting bodies in through the ventilator-flaps and so climb down one of the central tent-poles. This was done in pairs, one subaltern to each side of the tent—the loser, by time, standing drinks.

In the early hours of the morning we would go out, by ones and twos, into the cool, still, starlit night and make for our beds ; I to my hut, and they to their bell-tents and sagging camp-beds. The walk back to my quarters at this time of night was always interesting. Above, the stars hung as if suspended, and a cool breeze of the clean, open spaces brought the hardly detectable scent of wild flowers and grasses. I took breaths, cleaned out my smoke-stained lungs, and felt better for it. On every side were the soft night-noises, low chirrupings, a startled squeak, and intriguing

rustlings in the near-by hedge, or the long grass at its foot.

Sometimes a faint, only half seen shadow would glide swiftly across my front, and I knew it for the mess cat out upon his quite illegitimate occasions. Near my hut a whistle would bring the bull-terrier bounding from his bed in my room, to race up the slope towards me, his tail whirling and his face split by a broad grin. Together, we would go to bed, with myself fervently hoping the wine of the night would not bring with it after-effects when I awoke.

CHAPTER II

WILTSHIRE AND AFTERWARDS

I

OUR village ; how typical it was of peaceful, gracious English countryside. Fifty feet below our camp it lay on the main Salisbury to Devizes road. Clustered about the tiny square-towered church, and lining the road, were mellowed, red-bricked, or white-washed cottages. Some were thatched, and all owned tiny gardens where the hollyhock, lavender, foxglove, and forget-me-nots hid the homely cabbage and cauliflower, or even leek.

There was, of course, the House—house standing back from the road, solid, red, and unobtrusively affluent, with well-kept small lawns, tidy flower-beds, and the nanny watching her charges from the shade of a near-by tree. In the smaller house, further up the road, were the young couple from London who had given up their flat and come down into the country to race and to breed greyhounds. Madam was young, smart, and

modern, the envy of all the village girls, whilst her husband was amiable and happy-go-lucky. They owned a fast car, and they produced, at intervals, for my inspection, kennels, where there were litters of adorable hound puppies, each of which was to win the Waterloo Cup.

Beyond them, and not far from the church, was the "Rose and Crown", a typical village inn. Here I put away many a pint of beer in company with the local yokels, in the low-ceilinged smoked-grimed tap-room. Leading off it was a small room with tables and chairs and the inevitable dart-board.

What a popular pastime this is in the inns of England, after the day's work is over ; and how apparently complicated are the forms of the game that are played. In many an inn I have watched a game in progress, and have been astonished at the excitement and tension that it can produce. Tempers have been badly lost ; bad, wicked words used, and even blows exchanged, but it was rarely that the innkeeper did not rise to the occasion, and settle the affray with soft words and tactful soothing.

Leaving the inn on my way back to change for dinner in the mess, I would come across a village policeman. Large, stolid, and always faintly disapproving, he would bid me good night, and he generally left me with the impression that he was on the look-out for a "case".

Beyond the "Rose and Crown" was the tiny cottage where I and several officers fed whilst the camp was being brought into being at the beginning of the season. The woman who catered for us was typical of her Wiltshire breed. Careful, hard-headed, and suspicious, she was like all people who strive to live on a poor soil. In spite of this, her stews were excellent, and the great bowls of crisp and mixed salads, and plates of cold meats, ample and appetizing.

The room in which we fed was low, wall-papered, crammed with furniture, and quite unlovely. A curious, quite undefinable odour clung to it, and one which you always connect with the farm-house or cottage. In the bookcase near the tiny window was a collection of quite incredible semi-religious books. Books of good works, smug thought, and undigested religion—books which made you wonder what publisher had the courage to produce them, for their sales must have been very small, even in the 'nineties when they were produced.

I have gradually come to the conclusion that God, to the English villagers, speaking generally, is a hard, unforgiving, uncharitable person, who demands His full dues, and has no use for very human weaknesses. We officers were regarded by the household as strange, ungodly beings, already

singed by Hell-fires ; but, as potential issuers of ready cash, to be endured—sourly perhaps, but still, endured.

Peter used to walk down with me when I went to take my meals, and on arrival at the cottage, if he was not carefully watched, he would fade away into the kitchen and back quarters, from which he would emerge, in due course, suddenly and shamefacedly, followed by curses and the daughter of the house—he was nearly always licking his lips.

The vicar of the tiny village church was the embodiment of all we think best in the village parson. A gentle, small, white-haired old gentleman, he, when he came to see me in my office, as he sometimes did, made me self-conscious, because I knew that he was very close to what we all should strive to be. Cultured, gentle, understanding, and good in the very best sense of this vilely misused word, he brought his blind son to see me.

This son was a musician and studying in London for his degree, which he appeared to have every chance of getting. To see the old gentleman leading his good-looking son up the steep slope, and finally indicating where I stood, always made me forcefully realize that there are better things in life than the purely materialistic outlook of so many of us in these prosaic days. As was to be expected, the congregation in the tiny church was a small one

—the village as a whole had little use for the simple, and yet sincere, services held there.

The mentality of the villagers in this spot, so lovely, so charming, and so peaceful, left me bewildered ; there was a strain of hardness and intolerance in them which was unnatural. For example, they strongly objected to the artillery camp, which each year brought them some measure of prosperity, and they did not fail to make this quite plain. Why this should have been so, I, during four months, never fully understood. Admittedly, a quite unusual number of platinum blonde village maidens did walk of evenings with the better-looking of the soldiers, but not once did I have any trouble with the men from our own camp. This is astonishing, when it is considered that, during the whole time of the camp, some two thousand troops must have been in and about the village.

And yet this anti-military feeling was so strong that when the local elders were discussing the giving of a concert and dance in a local barn it was decided that the soldiers were not to be admitted, in spite of the fact that the occasion was in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the late King. It was only overruled when the ex-military owner of an inn at the far end of the village got up and bluntly told the elders what he thought of their

curious reasonings that the matter was put right.

One would have thought the parents of this remote village would have welcomed with open arms men of the Territorial Army, who were nearly all in good jobs and excellent as prospective husbands for their numerous daughters. But no ; and I suspect that some part of their repugnance could be traced to the fact that they considered all soldiery as licentious and undesirable. Perhaps they had bitter memories of the camps during the war years.

I have just spoken to my batman on this subject, and his view is that the villagers did not trust the soldiers near their daughters, having in mind that when the various brigades went back to their own counties it was the case of the old saying : "Out of sight, out of mind."

II

Towards the end of the summer a severe thunder-storm tore across the Plain from out of the east, and it was tropical in its noisy violence. During its passage it killed four horses and badly scared several men in a camp not far away from us.

When it was over I left my hut and went out to

inspect the camp, and found a curious and very disturbed state of affairs in a restricted area. Four large store-tents, one almost touching the other, had been blown down, and the scene was an extraordinary one. Masses of damp, white canvas sagged despairingly on the ground, whilst broken tent-poles, men's kits, tables, forms, stationery of all kinds, and stores of every description lay strewn about on the sodden grass. In the middle of the chaos stalked a rampant sergeant-major directing over-heated Territorial gunners in salvage duties. From him I learned that the four tents in question had collapsed in unison, and without any warning whatsoever, burying beneath them several badly startled and very indignant gunners. There had been no particularly violent gust of wind or flash of lightning, nor any plausible reason why the four should have come down together. Later, when discussing the affair in the mess with an expert on lightning-conductors, he told me that the ruin had most probably been brought about by a return flash of lightning. When asked to explain himself, he stated that a flash descending from a cloud to the earth must return from whence it came, and that it often did this at a point many miles distant from that where it had entered the ground, and that it did not visibly make its presence known. I am certain that this officer was not "pulling my leg",

for he was a serious-minded person, and not given to this form of humour.

From the western end of Salisbury Plain three roads lead into the city of Salisbury. The centre one, which follows the course of the lovely Avon, was that over which I liked to drive when going into the city. Unfortunately, the road surface is poor, and my car, being heavy and not over-young, suffered and protested.

This road, which begins from the outskirts of Amesbury, winds up and down the right bank of the river across the swelling slopes of the valley, and it is from here that you can obtain some of the most lovely views in all England, where the tiny village of Lake, lying about half-way to Salisbury, is concentrated English charm. It is so old that it goes back beyond history, and yet today little or nothing remains to show that, our earliest ancestors once lived, loved, and died here. I refused to believe that the people of those days did not dimly appreciate beauty, and that it was mere chance, grazing or water, that brought them to live in such places.

It is late June and the sun is setting behind the road and hillside. In the air there is that sense of restfulness and peace which hangs over the meadows, rushes, and calm waters of an English river valley, and which has nothing to compare with it in the

world for those of us who come from the south. We will stop the car at the top of the hill which leads down into the village of Lake, get out and stand by the roadside, and look at the view : a view such as men carry away in their hearts, to think of once again when England is a thousand odd miles away.

Between the trunks of dark trees, growing up from a steep slope which sinks to the level of the river, is a sight which causes us to catch our breath. Below, on the narrow river-bank, are a few thatched and half-timbered cottages, which have tiny gardens where the hollyhock vies with the lupin and larkspur, and all but hides the rich, dark loam. The river, at this point, takes a sharp bend away from us, and, edged with reeds and rich grasses, runs a straight course for some little distance to where two rows of graceful poplars line the banks. The water is placid, and on its surface is mirrored all the loveliness which surrounds it.

Beyond the river are meadows, stretching away into the middle distance, and their knee-deep, rich grasses are so bespangled with buttercups and marigolds as to make you think that the sun has decided to linger in this Arcadian spot.

Beyond the meadows, the hillsides of the valley are covered with dark-green trees, and half buried among them is a large, mellowed house from

whose chimneys rise up thin wisps of lazy smoke into the still, golden air.

There is hardly a sound of any kind. But now and again a bird cheeps sleepily, or a half-heard voice rises up from one of the cottages ; or maybe it is a splash in the river from rising trout which attracts our attention.

Returning to the car, we glide down into the village, where there is a vivid green open space, surrounded by trees, hoary barns, and trim, well-kept cottages, with the large manor house, built of the attractive flints, and which looks down upon the scene not unlike a benevolent guardian. There are few who can visit Lake and not wish to leave the tiresome, difficult world and live at peace beside the river, close to Nature in her most gracious mood.

Salisbury is one of our more dignified and unexpected cities, where the charm of its narrow streets, whose houses and planning go back into the romantic and distant past, cannot be marred, even today, by blatant modernity and chain stores, all of which are invading it. The atmosphere, the country folk, and the market-days are still vivid reminders of our history.

The cathedral close, beside which runs the river, hidden from sight, however, by a row of mellowed houses, is a haven of green and lovely

peace. The cathedral's exterior magnificence is too well known to need description. The interior, as is the case with all our great churches, is cheerless and gaunt. Grand the far-flung roof, splendid the vast pillars, but how austere, how bare, and how cold it is. To worship God in such a place is not to feel Him close beside you, but rather as a distant, grand person ; too superior and too removed to notice the humble you ; at least, that is how I feel when in our cathedrals.

One of the most perfect views I know is that of the cathedral seen at sunset time, in late June, across the meadows and streams which run in all directions to the south-west of the city. Softness, peace, and lovely harmony are in the air, and, as a background, the graceful spire rises up, a symbol of hope and of life eternal. I refuse to believe that there is no meaning, no reason, behind natural beauty, but why the Deity should go to such pains for us ungrateful and unappreciative mortals I have yet to understand.

To return to the less romantic side of Salisbury. During my periodical visits I shopped, and gazed into the fascinating windows of the curiosity shops, and then had tea in the charming, old-world tea-shop, at the back of which was the garden, where tables were set out under the shady trees. If it was later in the day when I arrived, then there was

the old inn which now calls itself an hotel, with its square courtyard into which the coaches used to clatter, an exotic barmaid, and succulent fillets of steak.

In the bar there was always the beer, the barmaid, and several brother officers from one or the other camps on the Plain. I, naturally, went in to drink the beer, but not so my companions. They came to gaze upon the unobtainable behind the bar, and I do not blame them. She was a wondrous, fascinating, and truly feminine creature. Her face and her figure were of the type which has attracted males all down the past and dim centuries, but drawing them to her purely because they were masculine. This young woman was not clever, but she did know how to make the best of what she had got. She was, incidentally, devoid of a sense of humour. I am sure she was virtuous ; that kind always are, although the male refuses to believe this. (Good gracious ! I am supposed to be talking of Salisbury, and not barmaids, fascinating as the topic is. A halt must be called.)

After the beer there might be a gin or two, whilst the steak was being prepared ; then would come the meal—and how good it was ! The steak, green peas, and chipped potatoes, ending up with strawberries and cream and black coffee. Then followed a visit to the local cinema, and the day

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ended with the drive back on the western road, across the dark, lonely Plain, with the North Star blazing ahead. Such pleasures are infinitely more satisfying than the complicated ones.

On one of these occasions, when just about to enter our village late at night, a dreadful thing happened. A large coal-black cat ran out from the left side of the road, and I swerved to avoid it, thinking it would continue, but it decided to retire. The car squashed it quite flat. Being of the West Country, I went about for a week in fear and trembling, but nothing undue or unpleasant took place.

III

One morning towards the end of camp the village postman's small son brought me a telegram which I tore open and read, and was completely mystified for a few moments. Then I remembered and laughed. It said :

Received offer 600 Wire if accepted.

The explanation which lay behind these words is not a generally known one, and therefore of interest. The authorities who live in that mysterious building the War Office keep for the Regiment what is known as a Foreign Service Roster. This list shows, by rank, the names of officers who

become due for service abroad. Officers returning home from a full tour of six years abroad naturally go to the bottom of this roster, and gradually work their way upwards until, once again, they become liable for foreign service.

Every year a varying number of officers are ordered to hold themselves in readiness to proceed to the outposts of the Empire, where they will replace those who are due to come home. The "Powers That Be" are not actively concerned, except in special cases, with the individual, and it is a case of so many majors, captains, and subalterns who have to be found for the various commands abroad.

From this point we go a step further in the explanation of the telegram. In view of what has been said above, there is no reason why I, who have just returned from a full tour of service abroad, and liked it, but am now entitled to remain about six years at home, should not agree to change places on the foreign service roster with another officer of my rank who has no desire to go abroad just at the particular time (he will have to go eventually). That the officer whose place I take at the top pays me handsomely for doing so is no concern of anyone except ourselves.

Four months previous to my receiving the telegram I had been approached by a person in London

who called himself an agent, and who specialized in arranging exchanges between officers. He inquired whether I would be willing to consider an exchange. I replied that I would do so, but that my price was £600. A pained letter came back stating that this was far too high, to which I answered I did not care if it was. It was what I required and I would stick to it. I was not particularly keen to go abroad, but I should not be able to resist such a sum of money if it were offered to me. I then forgot the matter, until the arrival of the telegram.

In due course the exchange was effected, and once again I stood near the top of the roster, due to depart later in the year for some, then unknown, destination, but richer by that goodly sum of £600. I could do a lot with it in India, the Far East, or Egypt. The officer who paid it to me did not, however, lose by the transaction, in fact he actually gained. He was in the unfortunate position of having children at the wrong age ; and had he gone abroad he would probably have had to keep two establishments, turn out of his comfortable home, and sell his hunters at a loss. He would have to go abroad eventually, for the authorities do not, generally, allow an officer to exchange twice, except at long intervals.

Everyone was pleased, that is except my brother officers, who gnashed their teeth with rage and

envy when they heard of my good fortune. But there was more to come, as the reader will learn.

Shortly after this, the last remaining brigade came to camp, and I realized my pleasant existence was drawing to a close and that I should have to return from whence I came. The last gun fired, the last shell went whistling its way over the coarse grasses, and the much harassed rabbits settled down for another year of comparative peace. There was now silence in the camp where all had been bustling activity. One by one the tents fell to the ground like tired birds, were carefully folded up, and sent back into store ; the camp was cleaned up and I prepared to depart.

There was that sad but pleasant feeling of autumn in the air, as my batman and I fitted ourselves into my grossly overladen car, and set off on our long journey to Plymouth, where the long, damp, dark days of winter awaited us. My bull-terrier was travelling in the back of the lorry which was carrying stores and my heavy kit. He leaned his attractive and ugly head over the tailboard and yelled at me as we slid past into the west, leaving him to proceed more sedately. The puppies had been previously disposed of.

Down through lovely Dorset we sped, where the mellowed country reflected the dying year, and I pulled in off the main road to call, once again, on

my friends at Chaffeymoor Grange, which I have described in another place. How lovely it was, and how warm my welcome. How pleasant a thing it is to be able to arrive at a house and know that every inmate will be pleased and glad to see you, from the maids, the chauffeur, the gardeners, to the animals. After a talk with my friends, and a walk round the ever-lovely gardens, a visit had to be paid to Isabel, the cook, and to where the great tawny Persian cat was, as usual, present in the kitchen, and he graciously permitted me to scratch an august ear.

I had soon to depart, for there was a long journey before me. Regretfully I trod on the self-starter of my car and it slipped out on to the hill and downwards to meet the main road which ran out into the west. Across Somerset and Devon, over the swelling woodland ridges we came to Exeter, that snare and delusion to the unwary driver. The city safely negotiated (but only just), we came at last, in the golden haze of a sunset, to where the unlovely outline of Plymouth smeared a darkening sky.

I know of more attractive cities than this, with its relaxing climate which makes the carrying out of any occupation a weariness ; its narrow streets and hideously noisy trams, behind and before which lurks death awaiting the unwatchful motorist.

Away up on the Hoe, and at the eastern end, is the Royal Citadel, my destination. This grim fortress was built in the old days, it is said, not so much as a defence against a foreign foe as to keep the turbulent people of Plymouth in order.

Roaring up the steep hill which leads out of the interesting narrow streets of the oldest portion of Plymouth, my car passed through the massive and magnificent gateway leading into the Royal Citadel. Just inside a guard springs to attention, and beyond is the wide square, surrounded by grey, cold-looking buildings made of the local granite. Behind them are the great bastions, on which can still be seen some of the old muzzle-loading guns. Directly to our front is the tall, imposing-looking building which is our mess.

It is dusk and the fortress is almost deserted. A man appears on his way out into the town, and except for him there are only the lights and a sad melancholy. In spite of a very happy time spent in this grim fortress, I have always hated living in an enclosed space, and when entering the Citadel it always reminded me how much it resembled a pleasant kind of prison. The local city elders have wished for many years to buy this spot from the Government and to turn it into a winter-garden pleasure ground.

From the windows of the ante-room in the mess

there is, however, one of the finest views in the west. They look out over the magnificent panorama of Plymouth Sound, with Drake's Island and the wooded slopes of Mount Edgecombe to the west, the steep cliffs of the Stadden Heights to the east, and, on the far horizon, the slim finger which is the Eddystone Lighthouse. This view is always beautiful, whether in summer with the sparkling sea and graceful yachts, or in winter when the heavy squalls tear across the water, and the waves pour like steam over the breakwater. According to popular legend, what is now the sergeants' mess tennis-court, which lies just inside the West Sally Port, was the spot on which Drake played his famous game of bowls. What foundation of truth lies behind this I do not know.

Leaving my batman to dispose of my kit and the car, I went into the mess for a wash and some tea. I had just finished and was about to go to my quarters, a room on the same floor as the ante-room, when a hideous din arose from one of the passages below. Yells, howls, groans, and most horrid snarlings, interspersed with shouts, told me instantly what was happening. Peter had arrived and was celebrating his return by a fight with an enemy in the form of a large Irish terrier. Hurriedly I descended and found that this was true, they having met on the back stairs leading to my room.

By the time I arrived on the scene the combatants had been separated by two scandalized batmen, and Peter, grinning happily to himself, fled up the stairs out of reach of my avenging hand.

Peter knew very well that he must not fight, and that he should ignore the insulting remarks made by the enemy, but in spite of this he could not help letting himself go now and again, just as he could not do anything about his rare bursts of original sin. One morning he had one of these fits in the Citadel, and whilst I was away in my bath he jumped on to my bed, a thing he was never permitted to do. Here he defied my batman, who tried to remove him, but on my reappearance he came off by means of his tail. I went in to breakfast, and on my return I found a dreadful thing had taken place. Peter had gone down to the wet and muddy parade ground, had a fight, returned covered in mud and blood, and had deliberately rolled all over the sheets and pillows of my bed. He was not in the least repentant after his chastisement.

Let us consider Army dogs, for they loom large in the private life of many officers. Dogs kept in barracks at home in England are usually owned by officers, and as a rule they are far more of a nuisance to the general community than the few which are kept by other ranks.

Most storemen, however, have a dog, for they

are old soldiers and do not sleep in barrack-rooms, but close to the stores they not only issue but guard as well. These dogs are always well behaved and intelligent, but not often beautiful to look upon. They are generally small females of very doubtful parentage, and their morals are a subject for lewd comment by all and sundry. They lie on their master's bed, or follow at his heels when he departs upon his legitimate business, and never do they haunt the cook-house doors as do the officers' animals.

A dog in a barrack-room is not officially banned, but its presence is just tolerated, and it is always removed when there is an inspection of any kind ; the beast is tied up in some secret but near-by spot, from whence it fills the air with its loud and indignant lamentations. Should a young soldier wish to have an animal in his barrack-room he must possess plenty of character, and be useful with his fists, if his dog's life is to be made at all a contented one. It will most surely be teased, cursed, cuffed, and overfed, unless, as has been said, he can force his will upon his room-mates.

At Plymouth there were ten dogs living in the officers' quarters in the mess building, and their breeds ranged from Dalmatians to Dachshunds, and Bull-terriers to weird mongrels. They fought at all hours of the day and night, their morals were

those of ordinary dogs, and they perpetually dug holes in our small, but cherished, pieces of lawn.

Should some inoffensive stranger, seeking a mate, wander in through the massive gateway, instantly one of the pack would spy it and give tongue. From all corners a shower of dogs would appear, with stiff tails and hackles erect. The stranger, if he were wise, would beat a very hurried retreat, yelling with fright ; if he dallied he was set upon, every dog nipping whatever portion of the stranger happened to be nearest his jaws, and the hideous din would penetrate to the farthest portions of our rooms. I have been awakened from deep slumber on several occasions by one of these mobbings.

Officers can become quite inflammable where their dogs are concerned. You may make a highly personal remark to a brother officer, and he will take no offence, but say something unpleasant about his dog and he bridles at once. On one occasion I made a bitter enemy by taking unto myself the task of forcing a man to remove his particularly nasty beast ; he, most unreasonably, treated the whole affair as personal spite on my part, whereas I was merely carrying out the wishes of at least four others besides myself.

Whenever there is a parade of any importance every dog is shut up in its master's quarters, but

at the critical moment one of them invariably escapes. With joy in its heart, it bounds on to the parade ground, seeking its master, who is standing stiffly to attention ; nearly trips up the colonel or inspecting officer ; finds what it is looking for and leaps upon its master, who is embarrassed and angry beyond measure. On one memorable occasion an inspecting officer bent down and patted one of these dogs, who happened to be of an engaging appearance. It promptly bit him, and it is best to draw a veil over the scene of wrath and gloom that followed.

CHAPTER III

OFF TO MALTA

I

I HAD not been back at Plymouth for more than ten days before serious rumours about the situation in the Mediterranean began to spread and grow in an alarming manner. *This* was going to happen : *these* troops were being held in readiness, and *those* ships were being sent off to unknown destinations. Malta figured largely in our discussions in the mess, and I, having been there before, was able to say what I thought about the harbour and dockyard there and its surroundings.

One sunny morning, with the sea sparkling and soft, and cloudlets floating in a washed-out cobalt sky, we were in the ante-room, having pre-luncheon gins, when a major arrived on the scene. He burst into the room, and we could see from his normally large, red, good-tempered face that something unusual had occurred. He did not keep us long in doubt as to what it was.

“Do you know what’s happened ?” he shouted at us.

We all said that we had no idea.

"I've been ordered off to Malta at forty-eight hours' notice ! Me, with a wife, children, a house, horses, and cars ! I just can't do it !"

We promptly made noises showing astonishment and sympathy.

"What in the world am I going to do ?" inquired the major in despair, and ordering himself a sherry. "I can't leave everything sitting, and go off into the blue. Why in heaven's name did they want to pick on me of all people ?"

"But you were due to go abroad this year, major," I said.

"Yes, but not for three months or so." He broke off and stood gazing at me with a speculative look in his eyes, and I knew instantly what was coming.

"You're due abroad again this year, after that exchange of yours, aren't you ?" he inquired.

I said I was.

"Well, what about going to Malta in my place ?"

"Not on your life I won't," I said firmly. "I'm off to India, I hope."

"How much will you take ?"

"But I don't want particularly to go to Malta again. I've been there before. Besides, it's Coast Defence, and you know how I loathe that. Anyway, I could not possibly go in so short a time."

The major picked upon this at once as showing signs of my weakening.

"How much do you want?" he inquired again.

I thought, and those near-by held their breaths whilst I did so.

"I'd take two hundred to go. No, a hundred and fifty," I said. "But only on the condition that I have at least a week's grace."

"Done," said the major instantly, and I wished I had stuck to the two hundred.

He then suggested that I went up to London and fixed up the exchange. This I most firmly refused to do, saying that I was merely doing this to oblige him, and to get him out of a hole, and that he must do all the dirty work himself.

In due course the major departed to London, saying that he would send me a telegram the following morning if he had been successful in his cooing to the War Office.

The mess were inclined to be more than a little aggrieved when this new bargain became generally known. That I was already in possession of £600, and was now likely to get another £150, and just for going out to Malta, was almost too much to be borne by the penniless, of which I had so recently been one. I was given to understand that they did not consider my person worth such a sum. I

laughed contentedly, and prepared myself to depart in haste on leave.

The telegram arrived saying that everything had been fixed up and that I was to report to Portsmouth in eight days time.

Although I have done it very many times, I can never, calmly and sedately, dig myself out of a place in which I have lived for any length of time—I had been nearly two years in the Royal Citadel. The knowledge that, on this occasion, I had to do the uprooting in record time did not help matters at all.

When starting to pack it is always a source of amazement to discover how my possessions have accumulated, and I have certainly not got that jackdaw instinct for collecting odds and ends just because they might come in useful some time. I do, however, keep string and brown paper, but this can never be found when required, and only comes to light when uprooting begins.

This packing at Plymouth was complicated by grave doubts. I was officially only being sent out to Malta to assist in meeting a temporary emergency, and when that passed should I be allowed to return to England before being sent further East? Only the gods knew the answer to that, and so, having to make up my mind one way or the other, I decided to risk it, and assume that I should come home

in due course, always excepting there was no war.

People unconnected with the Services have little idea of the amount of clothes we officers have to provide out of our small pittances, and not only do we have to produce them but to renew them. There are two complete and different sets of uniform and two of mufti, one set of each for winter and the others for summer wear. Besides this, there are numerous outfits needed, such as mess kit, patrol jackets, hunting kit, polo kit, and service equipment, which includes revolvers, haversacks, compasses, map-cases, etc. I have eight entirely different forms of head-gear : service caps, mess caps, khaki topees, white topees, steel helmet, a bowler, an opera hat, caps, and soft mufti hats of various designs. These, together with an equally varied assortment of footwear, had to be sorted and stowed away.

In the middle of this sartorial chaos, which, together with trunks, boxes, suit-cases, and helmet boxes, littered the floor of my room, sat Peter, the bull-terrier. He knew what was taking place, and followed my every movement with his deep brown eyes, occasionally thumping his tail on the floor when I came near him. He knew I was departing, but what worried him was, did I mean to take him with me? Poor Peter, I had not the heart to tell

him that he would have to go to a new owner. He would grieve and feel lost for a few days, and then all would be well, for he was not one of those dogs who pine for a lost master. A few large, red, juicy bones, and I should be forgotten ; and there would be the excitement of a new cat to hunt, or the prospect of a walk strewn with fresh and only too fascinating smells. I have since learned that he is completely happy.

After several hot, exasperating hours amid my boxes, I suddenly gave up and departed for London. Filled with despair and gloom, I said to myself that the packing problem would solve itself on my return.

A sleeper shot me out at Paddington at an unearthly hour in the morning and I went off to my club for a bath and breakfast, only to find that the place was not yet officially opened. There are more pleasant places than a London club in the hands of the housemaids and such-like beings, who appear only during the hours before 8 a.m. I forced my way, however, into the club and, shooing out an indignant maid, got myself a bath and shaved. After that I felt better, for, in common with most Englishmen, I have a very rooted objection to appearing in public at any time of the day in an unshaven condition ; not to have had a bath does not matter so much, but to be unshaven is not to be borne.

In London I enjoyed myself as only a man can do when he knows that there is an ample bank balance behind him. There were, of course, interviews with bankers, lawyers, publishers, and other people who manage my affairs, and each one dealt with was a good job done. Why is it that business men, when you go to see them with little time to waste, cannot get down to the point straight away? There must always be that ten minutes introductory chat, when you find that, if you are not very firm from the start, you are talking about the Derby when it is your urgent desire to discuss stocks and shares ; or perhaps the prospects of war, when it is settlements or deeds in which you are interested at the moment. To come directly to the point is always regarded as being abrupt and rude. I nearly always do this, and I know it is forgiven because I am in the Army. Army officers are well known to be rough and crude where business matters are concerned.

When the necessary interviews were over I sallied out and indulged in a mild orgy of buying—things that, before this time, I had resolutely put behind me as being unnecessary and extravagant.

My shopping adventures, after fine raiment and such-like pleasure-giving entertainment, were somewhat damped by knowing that I should have to pay cash. What a curious, and almost universal,

masculine complex this is. I keep to one hosier and one tailor almost entirely because I do not have to pay them in pound notes.

Not long ago I was sitting in the lounge of an hotel, and just behind me there was an affluent business man with two companions. They were discussing this topic ; at least the business man was doing so. His conversation was something like this, as far as I remember :

"I've just had to pay my bill here in cash. Damned nuisance. I hated it. Why on earth couldn't they take a cheque? Of course, I know they've got to be careful ; but do I look as if I gave out dud cheques?"

There followed instant denials from the other two men.

"It's a funny thing, yer know. I've always hated paying cash. It almost hurts to hand over five-pound notes across a counter, and just fancy counting out and handing over four hundred pound notes for a car! I just couldn't do it, and yet I'd write a cheque for double that and not think twice about it. Funny, ain't it?"

And I very nearly turned round and said how deeply I agreed with him and his sentiments.

The reason for this complex appears to be deep down, and is a heritage left to us by our very distant ancestors. When a primitive man, even today,

has in his possession something he values highly, he will hang on to it almost to a point of giving up his life, but if the object is removed when he is not looking he will hardly notice his loss. The giving of a cheque seems to me another way of removing what we value without the visible effect of being deprived. At least, that is how I figure it out.

II

In due course all was prepared ; my boxes packed, my car and wireless sold, and Peter installed in his new quarters ; and, like so many other problems in life, it had all turned out to be far easier than I had anticipated it would be.

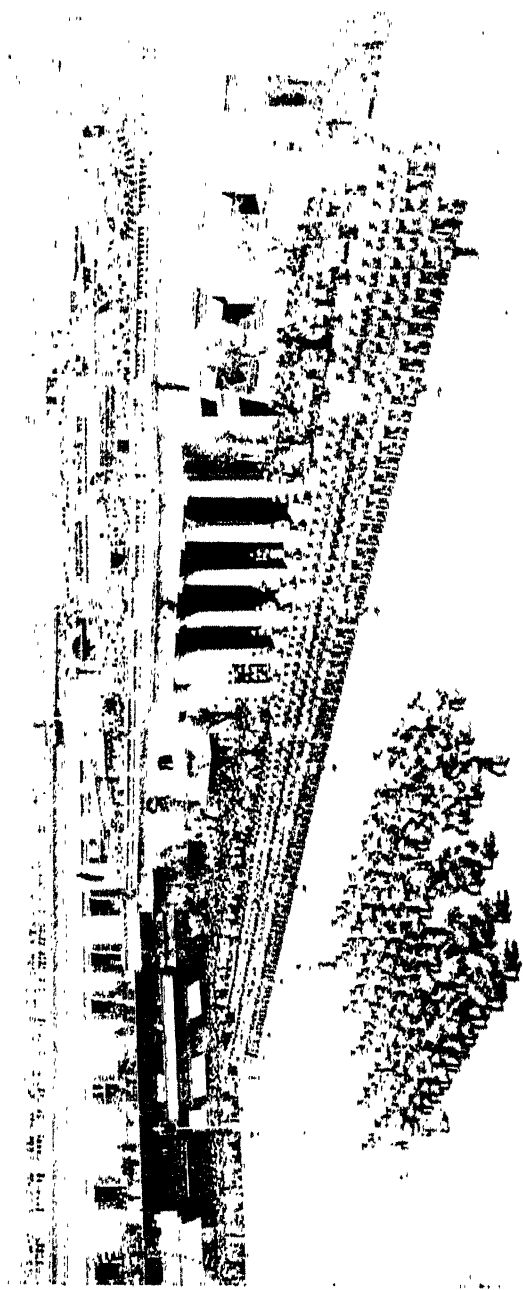
I left Plymouth on a Sunday morning, and, my batman having had to go ahead, I was obliged to manage my small mountain of baggage on that station platform. This luggage, owing to my being on official duty, was to be carried free on the train, but through a mistake on my part I produced the wrong Army Form. In the twinkling of an eye a scene developed between a railway official, two porters, and myself. Using sweet words and violent oaths alternately, I said there was not now time in which to produce the correct form before the train left, but the official, backed by the porters,



Where the lovely ladies display their charms when bathing at Tigne.



The children's pool at Tigne.



A military parade on the famous square in Valleria. It was on this spot that much of the history of the Knights of Malta was made.

refused to touch one small case unless the proper form was produced. In despair I sent off one of the Army drivers, who had brought down the luggage, to find, and instantly bring to me, this accursed form. Good fellow that he was, he sped away and returned with it just in time. All was well ; the driver smiled on receiving his tip, the official grinned, and the porters simpered expectantly, awaiting distribution of largess.

Thirty-six hours in Portsmouth followed, during which there was an unexpected and very hectic evening, in company with several naval officers, at "The Goat", a well-known house of liquid refreshment. This was one of the few evenings in my life when I could almost say I had had too much to drink. The journey to Southampton the following morning, in company with several hundred gunners and numerous brother officers, might have been a more pleasant one—the morning after is, for me, generally a sad occasion.

The embarkation into the troopship lying alongside in the docks at Southampton reminded me forcibly of the late war, for there was an air of tension and excitement abroad, and never in peace time have I seen such a variety of Service officers as were crowding the decks and public rooms. The ship was packed to its utmost carrying capacity, where naval officers, marines, clergymen, colonels,

A.D.C.s, men called back from leave, and representatives from every branch of the Army surged to and fro in varying forms of agitation.

A queer mixture of types they were, and I leaned against the rails and watched them. There were colonels, fully aware of their importance, who stood in groups with worried frowns on their brows, trying to give the impression that they were discussing deep and important State secrets; majors, fat, thin, jolly, depressed, or hearty, most of whom were bidding farewell to their families; and, finally, junior officers of all shades, types, and conditions, who avoided the colonels as they wandered up and down the deck getting in other people's way. Amid the crowd, the ship's adjutant dashed to and fro, looking harassed and carrying large bundles of papers. Then there were Marine officers hurrying on mythical (?) jobs of work, involving much saluting of each other -- (am I being unkind? Perhaps, but it was true) -- and, as a background, there was the never-ending stream of troops pouring into the ship to vanish between decks.

Having found my cabin, counted my luggage, and given instructions to my batman, I decided to go ashore again for a while, to get away from those empty hours which lie between arrival and sailing in a ship. Two other stray gunner officers and

myself went off to the South-Western Hotel to pass the time in a pre-luncheon drink. Unfortunately, both my companions had a grievance, and each aired his own particular one for my benefit. Both had been ordered abroad at short notice, and one had recently returned from a tour of foreign service ; the other owned three half-trained hunters which he had hoped to train fully during the coming season, but which had now been left on his hands. All this was undoubtedly unfortunate ; but surely you have to make the best of misfortunes of this kind ?

People with grievances are, at the best of times, difficult to handle. They must have an audience, and they must impress upon it how extremely hard hit they have been. The more sympathy you offer the worse they become. My own particular case, whilst we were consuming our drink in the bar of the hotel, was complicated by the fact that one of my companions was "showing off". I was given to understand that he would be badly missed in one of the leading Shire packs ; that he rode straight to hounds, and was a horse-master of no mean ability. I endured this horse-shop for as long as I was able, and then stated that I thoroughly disliked the horse, and those who had anything to do with it. This, as I hoped it would do, had the desired effect, and we returned almost

at once to the ship. (I do not, actually, dislike horses.)

The time of departure was now drawing near, and the visitors were shooed ashore to gather in tiny groups on the quay. How pathetic they always are, and how differently they conduct themselves. Some weep quietly, hiding their grief behind tightly held handkerchiefs ; others shout last-minute instructions or news ; but mainly they stand with mute, upturned faces which now and again smile, grimace, or become just blank masks. These are the mothers, lovers, and wives who return to empty houses to wait for the mails.

The last man and the last kit-bag had been brought aboard, and the sailors prepared to let down the shore gangway. The fore well-deck was packed with a good-humoured mass of men, who laughed, joked, and perched themselves in all kinds of dangerous positions, whilst the Press photographers scrambled like monkeys on the huge crane beside the ship. One called out, telling the men to smile ; they did so, and a roar of laughter went up.

What a grand lot of fellows they were down there, but what children at heart ! Few were over twenty-six years of age, most were just out of their 'teens, and, looking down at them, I wondered, if war came, as it might well do, which amongst them would lie gassed, with black distorted faces, on the yellow

rocks of Malta, or spread-eagled and drying up on the hot sand of Egypt. A yellow-haired, good-looking young giant, an able seaman, looked up, and catching my eye he grinned. Would he be dragged, gasping, down in the whirlpool about his sinking ship? No; I turned away, for such thoughts were better dismissed.

Slowly and sedately we slid down Southampton Water, and it was at this point I discovered what must have been an almost unique situation in a large, modern steamship: there was not a single female aboard—not a stewardess or a nurse. Here it may be mentioned that troopships, in normal times, carry many women: wives of all grades, nurses and stewardesses, to say nothing of the children. (Children scream more loudly and are more of a nuisance in a troopship than in any other form of ship.)

A transport is the most deadly of all the forms of sea-travel, for it is neither a cargo-boat nor is it a passenger liner, and yet it has the drawbacks of both, aggravated by a modified form of Army discipline. In our ship there must have been two hundred officers, and one hundred and forty-nine of them talked Service shop from the moment they awoke until the time they retired at night. Only those who have endured it know the awfulness of this type of conversation.

Our human cargo had to be kept employed, amused, fed, and inspected. How it was inspected, and at all hours of the day and night ! The main inspection, however, was at 10.30 in the morning, when the captain of the ship took charge, and on one occasion I had to form a part of the crocodile which raced along the decks behind him. Here are some of those who made up the party : the troop officer (a ship's officer), the ship's adjutant (sometimes), the quartermaster, the medical officer, the officer of the day, the field-officer of the day, numerous other ship's officers, and, finally, a bugler.

At 10.15 a bugler blew a blast and every man below decks leapt to his feet and ran ; not only did he run, but he stumbled up gangways and tripped over ropes, wire hawsers, stanchions, and such-like things, finally to come to the spot where he was detailed to fall in with the remainder of his companions, at one of various points selected, all over the ship.

Punctually at 10.30 the captain appeared and the "Progress" began. The men, lining the decks and standing to attention, were glanced at ; the cooking-places, latrines, washing-places, troop-decks, store-rooms, and other places far too varied to mention here, were subjected to hawk-like glances from the captain, who now and again barked out some order.

"Progresses" are normally slow and stately affairs, but not in a troopship. Around we tore, down we sped, and up again, as if our very lives depended upon reaching some mythical goal. Should one of the panting party behind the captain pause for but one brief moment to comment on this or that, he most surely lost track of the "Progress", and a frantic search on his part was necessary before finding his quarry, which, by that time, was probably two decks above or below him.

Running lightly and gracefully up and down impossibly steep and slippery gangways in any form of ship has never been one of my accomplishments, nor am I good at avoiding the great variety of traps set for the feet between decks, to say nothing of low door-ways and sharp projections. At the end of my one and only "Progress" in the troopship I found myself not only breathless and semi-exhausted, but I had badly barked one of my shins, had my cap jammed over my eyes by a low door-way, and had collected a dark stain of grease on my Service jacket.

The Bay was blue and uneasy, with its innumerable and tiny tramp-steamers chugging their ways homewards and outwards, as they darkened the horizon in all directions with their smoke. Down the coast of Portugal we ran into fog—dense patches of it—and, as a result, the ship was slowed down at

times so much that we hardly seemed to be moving through the water. Our fog-horn was loud and brutal, and ravished the ears ; in fact it closely resembled an infuriated bull telling the world what he thought about life in general. From all sides other ships were bellowing in a similar manner, and to us who listened it seemed as if we were entirely surrounded by shipping.

The sound from one particular fog-horn, however, surely and banefully grew nearer. Closer and closer it grew, but from what direction none of us on deck knew : it appeared to come from all around us. Our fog-horn had, by this time, become quite hysterical, if the voice of a bull can do such a thing. I was leaning over the rails of the fore well-deck on the starboard side when it happened. There were several shouts, and I tore across to the port side of the ship to see something which made me catch my breath with fright. There, hardly fifty yards away from our side, was the vast bulk of a ship tearing past us, moving in the same direction as ourselves and travelling at a good ten knots (we were stationary, or nearly so). Out of that dense fog she came like a monster in some horrific nightmare. Menacing, silent, and hideously homicidal, she quickly faded again into the fog and was gone. Half a point to starboard and she must have rammed us dead astern. This was

the narrowest escape from a collision at sea I have ever had, and if it had taken place it would have been disastrous.

I learned later, when we had all recovered, that large cargo-boats in a hurry often do take these risks in a fog ; but it seems shamefully unfair on well-behaved and careful captains, such as ours was. The things people said about that ship will not bear repeating. I said some of them myself.

CHAPTER IV

ANCIENT MALTESE HISTORY

THE days slid easily by, as they will at sea, and, turning, we slipped into the Mediterranean on the last lap of our journey. As Malta grew near, so did our speculation grow. Was there going to be war? It certainly looked as if this were possible; and, in that event, what sort of time were we, who were getting off at Malta, going to have? A pretty sticky one from all accounts. The Navy had gone, we learned, and in the event of an attack we should have to defend ourselves, not only from the sea, but the air as well. Those who were supposed to know made our hair stand on end by stating that Italy had over two hundred aeroplanes waiting in Sicily to load vast numbers of bombs and blow us in Malta off the yellow rocks.

And so, early one morning, we awoke to find that the ship was nearing the Grand Harbour.

The coast of Malta, as seen from an approaching ship, is a low line of yellowish bare rock, with

no visible signs of vegetation. But as you near the Grand Harbour the tall wireless-masts stand out against the sky, and it becomes possible to pick out individual buildings from the mass which cluster behind the Sliema Front, a suburb of Valletta.

Gliding in between the arms of the breakwater, I leaned over the rails and looked, once more, upon what I knew so well. There was St. Elmo Fort, with its lighthouse and glorious past, and, facing it, Fort Ricasoli, which must be one of the largest single forts in the world. Beyond it, further down the harbour, is the imposing building which is Bighi Hospital, and the spot chosen by Napoleon for his palace in Malta—an excellent site.

Still further down that long, narrow, and famous stretch of water, which was then entirely void of warships of any kind, the fascinating bulk of Valletta rose up to serrate a pale-blue sky. The herded houses cluster above the massive bastions, built so long ago by the Knights, and I know no port in the world which looks so attractive at first sight as does Valletta. Few, also, have so many interesting things to be seen in so small a space.

I will gloss over the hot and hectic business of disembarkation, where officers and men landed at one spot and their baggage at another, with the result that one of my boxes was over-carried to Alexandria. There it sat for two months before

it was returned to me, in spite of all I could do. As I have said in another place, there is nothing so exasperating as to mislay a piece of luggage, and in this case, as always, it was the one box I could least do without.

When visiting a place for the first time, or even reading about it, we generally like to know something about its make-up and its history. Here I propose to give an essence of the history of Malta, against which, as a background, we may set the stage for more modern times.

The Maltese Islands, of which there are five, Malta, Gozo, Comino, Comminotto, and Filfolà (only Malta and Gozo have any importance, the remainder being little more than barren rocks), lie just off the main shipping route to the Eastern Mediterranean. The nearest point to Europe is between Sicily and the islands, the distance being only fifty-eight miles.

Malta, the most important, and the only island in this group with which we are concerned, is roughly seventeen miles long and nine miles wide, with a total area of about ninety-one square miles. Ridges of low hills strike across the island, and the cliffs on the western seaboard are, in certain places, as much as 400 feet in height and sheer to the sea. Around the coast are numerous small bays and inlets, but, of course, the splendid twin harbours

are the main reason for Malta's importance in the world today.

There are no rivers, and the surface of the island, if it had been left in its natural state, would be barren rock with an accumulation of earth in the shallow valleys. From very remote times, however, this earth has been dug up from the lower slopes and carted up the hills to form a thin layer of soil on which corn and grasses can be cultivated. The earth is kept in place by low, loose stone walls, and, as a result, the country on the lower slopes gives the impression of deadly monotony, where Malta appears to be just one stone wall after another, with a tree here and there to bring to your notice how barren it is. Much earth was imported in the past, when ships, instead of paying customs duties or harbour dues, gave instead a load of earth brought from the country of the vessel's origin. Except in the bottoms of the valleys the soil is nowhere more than a few feet thick, and in some places only inches deep, through which the bare rock thrusts its head ; and yet, when the rainfall is satisfactory, astonishingly fine crops are raised from it, which are said to be fertilized by the fine dust blown across the sea from the African coast at certain times of the year.

Geologically, the islands are extremely interesting, consisting as they do of five distinct layers.

They have fallen into and risen from the depths of deep waters on several occasions, and important rivers once flowed across the surface, but where they rose and emptied themselves we shall never know, although, in the soil, history is plainly written for all to see. It is an interesting fact that the bed of the Mediterranean is still uneasy, and the waters in the great harbours at Malta quite frequently behave in an unusual manner. Without any warning, usually in the early morning, the water will recede from the heads of the creeks, leaving wide expanses of damp mud, on which lie many agitated and indignant fish. Then again the normal level of the water may rise three, and even four, feet, to fall again and rise as if the sea were breathing deeply.

Some authorities say that the main island is now not unlike a mushroom on its stalk, and that one day it may snap off and the land slide into the sea once again. Whether this is a fact or not, there is no doubt that much of the coast-line is deeply undermined below the level of the sea by the action of the waves. One of the great forts, built by the Knights, is visibly falling into the sea from this cause, and portions of it are, in addition, labelled as unsafe.

The deepest of the five layers resembles the uppermost, in that it is composed of a soft coral limestone, made so many years ago that the

number of noughts leave us breathless with wonder.

Above this layer is the Globigerina Limestone formed mainly of compressed sea-shells ; then comes the Blue Clay, which, being impervious to water, gives the islands their water-supply ; next is the Green Sand, with its mass of organic remains made up of sharks, whales, and such-like marine beasts ; and finally there is the upper Coralline Limestone. It is from these limestones that the biscuit-coloured building stone is cut, for they are comparatively soft and easily worked, and they stand up very well indeed to climatic conditions.

There is no shadow of doubt that, at one or more periods, these islands formed a bridge between Europe and Africa, whence came the migrating animals, driven south by a spreading ice-age. These animals halted on what is now Malta, and they died in their thousands, for their bones tightly packed together, are found in layers many feet deep in the various caves into which they were washed by rivers or floods. There are the remains of elephants, swans, tortoises, deer, bears, pig hippopotami, and birds of all kinds, and also what is suspected to be a man. A single tooth has been found in one of the caves, and, as usual, in such cases, those who are supposed to know cannot agree whether it is human or not. How they ever

begin to try to decide has always been a mystery to me.

Prehistoric knowledge of the inhabitants of the group is, of course, gathered from ruins, pottery, and implements, dug up or found in tombs or temples. From an archaeologist's point of view the island of Malta is fascinating, for the place is strewn with remains of all kinds of the late Stone Age. These Megalithic ruins, dating back to about 5000 years ago, where some of the stones are bigger than those of Stonehenge or Avebury, are in an astonishingly good state of preservation when their age is considered. (See chapter on the Sights of Malta.) Who the people were who made these truly wonderful places is, as it usually is, a matter of fierce controversy. Some say they were a branch of the true Mediterranean race, but they were undoubtedly Semitic, as the Maltese language bears out.

The first real colonists were those amazing people the Phoenicians, or Punic rulers, and under them the islands became of great importance, for these people quickly realized the value of the harbours and the unique position of Malta from a trading point of view.

Then came the Carthaginians, followed by the Romans, who in turn were ousted by the Saracens in 870, and who ruled for two hundred years. After these people came a bewildering number of nations

and nationalities, who took over the islands ; but, as was natural, the fate of Malta was closely linked with that of its huge neighbour, Sicily. Count Roger, the Norman, took the islands in 1090 and gave them to Sicily. He was followed by the Angevins, Aragonese, and Castilians. Then Charles the Fifth gave Malta to the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem ; after them came the French, and, finally, ourselves.

The Maltese fiercely deny that they, and their blood, has become mixed by this great succession of foreign occupants, and they maintain that they have kept themselves to themselves, and are the off-shoot of the famous, but mythical, Mediterranean race. Their language is certainly Semitic and does not resemble any other European speech. To me it consists of an astonishing number of J's, X's, Y's, and Z's. Such names as Sijuwī, I Hofra il Zaghira, and Ir Ramla, Mishkuba, and Naxxar are tongue-twisting, and have not a European tang.

The greatest event in all of Malta's varied history was undoubtedly the sudden and unexpected arrival of St. Paul on the island. Paul, it will be remembered, got into serious trouble in Jerusalem and, after being imprisoned, demanded that his case should be tried in Rome. King Agrippa said to Festus that if Paul had not demanded to see Caesar he might have been set free.

Instead, however, Paul, together with other prisoners, was handed over to the centurion called Julius, and they set out for Italy.

On the voyage St. Paul had a serious difference of opinion with the centurion over the prolonged delays at the various ports. He went as far as to say that the centurion, and the remainder, would deeply regret not paying attention to what he said. ("Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives." Acts xxvii. 10.). Paul was quite right, for not long after leaving Crete they met what is called Euroclydon, whose modern name is Gregale, a high wind which blows from the north-east during the winter months.

They did not see the sun or the stars for many days and were driven helplessly before this wind, and finally they gave up hope. Paul then rose up and said: "I told you so." (How very human he was, in some ways!) But he tried to cheer up everyone on board by saying that they would lose the ship, but none of those in her.

After fourteen days land was sighted and everybody, including the soldiers, wanted to let down a boat and get ashore; in other words, there was a panic on board, but Paul took matters in hand. The Acts say that there were two hundred, three-score and sixteen people in that ship (276), which

seems to be a large number, and also that the ship was laden with wheat. St. Paul told everyone to eat and keep cool, because they were all going to be saved from drowning. They believed him, ate meat, threw the cargo overboard, and the ship came in towards the shore.

Here is the scene as I picture it from the shore.

The Gregale had been blowing for over a week, and the high wind and rain had interfered with the peasants' work in the fields towards the north and east side of the island of Malta.

Near the northern end there is a large bay, which has a small, low island lying just off the point. All through the night the fishing-folk living on the shores of this bay sat in their small square houses, and listened to the roar of the wind and the sound of the great waves breaking on the rocks below. When the morning came, one woman sent out her small boy to borrow a little olive oil from a neighbour. The boy, about ten years old, staggered in the gusts of wind, and the driving rain stung his face. Instinctively he turned his face towards the sea and there saw a sight which held him spell-bound. Being driven across the mouth of the bay towards the small island was a huge ship crowded with men, whose faint shouts came to his straining ears. Running back to the house, the boy told his parents what he had seen, with the result that it

was not long before there was a small number of men, women, and children running across the rough fields towards where the ship was being driven on to the rocks.

Closer she came and closer, and it became quite obvious that she was going to strike the narrow channel between the island and the mainland, where the sea boiled furiously, for there was a strong current running here which was driven against the winds and waves.

As the great ship struck the rocks the onlookers gasped, and stared with fascinated eyes to where the fore-part, jammed on the rocks, held fast ; but the aft broke off, and clinging to it were many men. The peasants, now seeing several men jump off the fore-part of the ship, rushed down to the shore and helped to drag them to safety. Others, buffeted by the waves, were washed ashore as they clung to pieces of wreckage.

Almost the first man to be pulled out of the water was St. Paul, his habit clinging to him, and his white beard bedraggled and filled with salt and water. In spite of his obvious weariness and age, he turned to and helped in the work of rescue. One by one the passengers, with tired eyes and pinched faces, were dragged ashore, until all were saved.

Paul, together with the centurion and the other prisoners, was taken to a near-by house, where a

fire was soon set burning. Paul, cold and damp, went near to the fire, which was beginning to blaze up, and, bending down, stretched out his hands to warm them. An adder, which had been lying amid the wood, and now aroused by the heat, sprang out and fastened on to his hand. A cry went up from those near-by, for the Maltese believed that to be bitten by a snake was a sure sign the person concerned was a murderer. St. Paul, who was by no means upset, shook off the snake and, instead of falling down and dying, carried on as if the incident had not taken place. This to the local fishermen was a marvel of marvels.

Paul remained on the island for about three months, and during that time he converted many of the local inhabitants to Christianity. He was aided in his work by the fact that he cured the father of Publius of a bad attack of dysentery. Publius was the Roman governor, and he became one of the first converts.

In due course St. Paul set out for Rome in a ship from Alexandria, and his subsequent fate is well known. As is natural, he is the patron saint of the Maltese, and many legends have arisen about his name. One of the more amusing is that during his stay he removed the venom from the fangs of snakes and placed it in the mouths of the women. (There are now no poisonous snakes on the island.)

CHAPTER V

LIFE IN MALTA

I

BEFORE attempting to describe the life in Malta, something must be said about those of us who, in normal times, made up the station.

First and foremost is the Navy, who account for about three-quarters of the station. The battleships and cruisers, and such-like large ships, lie in the Grand Harbour, whilst the destroyers, submarines, and other smaller craft use the harbour of Marsamuscetto. In one of the creeks leading off the Grand Harbour is the large and important dockyard, with its huge floating-dock, and it is upon the dockyard that the Maltese depend for what measure of prosperity there is in the place.

The Army is represented by several batteries of the Royal Regiment of Artillery ; the Royal Malta Artillery, which is manned entirely by Maltese, but paid by the War Office ; at least three battalions of infantry, and all the usual auxiliary services, such as the Royal Engineers, Signals, and Army Service

Corps, besides many others. The Royal Air Force also is fairly well represented, there being a large aerodrome and a seaplane base.

Single officers live, of course, in their ships or messes, but the married rent furnished flats, or houses, in certain portions of Valletta and its suburbs. There are actually three defined areas, each graded on the social scale. Highest comes Guardamnagia, which lies half-way between Valletta and Sliema. Here used to live the Lordly Ones ; admirals and other social luminaries occupied the large houses, in what is vulgarly known as Snobs' Alley ; colonels, and other lesser Service lights, live in the area in and about Strada Mezzodi in the city, which is graced by having Admiralty House on one side of its narrow roadway.

Most of the junior officers, to whom the social side means little or nothing, live in Sliema. Here, in a maze of streets, at the back of a long sea front, are rows of small, two-storeyed houses, which are rented furnished ; and they are occupied indiscriminately by both Britons and Maltese. All but the least expensive of these houses or flats are surprisingly airy, clean, and cool, and the furniture supplied is at least serviceable, if not often beautiful to look upon ; much, however, depends upon the particular landlord.

Food is cheap, but the same cannot be said of

the fuels needed to cook it. Servants are bad—dreadfully so. They are unintelligent, lazy, and, at one time, most independent. Much of the trouble can be traced to the fact that their employers are heretics, and only to be worked for because they pay well.

I am now going to touch on a delicate subject, but this one is such a part of the life in Malta that it cannot be avoided.

Life from the Service wife's point of view is not without serious drawbacks, and, in consequence, she cannot be held entirely to blame for what follows. She spends a great deal of her time during the day either in being bored or in seeking for what she considers congenial occupation or companionship. It must be remembered that Service husbands are fully engaged for most of the day, earning their pay ; and also that when the Fleet is away a naval wife is left to her own devices in a husbandless home for weeks and even months on end.

Many Service wives, and most certainly most naval ones, are not domesticated, and they have to be amused in one way or another. This they do by seeking out their own kind, whom they meet in their houses, clubs, or even the Snake Pit. (A fitting name for the portion of the Union Club in Valletta which is set aside for women.) It not being possible to talk indefinitely about your

servants, husband, or the latest book, these women naturally turn to the next most absorbing topic, which is the doings of those among whom they live. The result of this is that your seemingly most trivial actions in public, which at home would be passed over unnoticed, are commented upon, exaggerated, and passed on, until the distortion becomes ludicrous. Unfortunately this tittle-tattling is not always confined to the wives, for many a husband has been known to catch the complaint from his wife, with the dire result that many a man's reputation is torn to pieces at a club bar, and far more savagely than any woman would do it.

It is a good thing to remember, whether you are in the Service or not, that when living in a Service station, and in Malta particularly, the price you must be prepared to pay for being in any way unconventional is a high one.

Having spoken of the wives, what about us men? In giving just an outline of the lives we led, the Navy must be separated from the two other Services, for its outlook is different.

At all hours of the day and night the Navy dashed about our blue sea, making nasty smudges against the clear sky and shaking our houses with its gunfire, or it lay in harbour and polished with a frenzied zeal. How fond the Navy is of cleaning things! Nothing in a ship is so immaculate,

polished, or painted that it is not better for being touched up. If it is not the ship's sides which are being furbished, then it is the galleys, gangways, decks, or funnels. I often wonder that the guns stand the strain of so much metal-polish and elbow-grease. How warming it would be to the heart of a manufacturer of metal-polish, soap, or paint to stand on the shore and watch this activity!

We in the Army in Malta did all the things which are usually done. We marched, drilled, fired lethal weapons of various kinds and sizes, dealt with official correspondence, and also cleaned things; but not to the extent carried out by the Senior Service.

Before luncheon the Navy collects in its ward-rooms, drinks gin, and talks "shop" to the exclusion of all else, whilst the Army gathers in its ante-rooms and drinks ginger ale (mainly); and it talks sport, which can be almost as tiresome as "shop".

"Shop" is a Service word meaning talk, or discussion, in connection with work, during the hours of relaxation, as opposed to play or amusements. It is a shocking complaint, and one which the most wary can contract with ease if care is not taken. Talking "shop" in a mess is barred, and those who indulge in it are usually told to stop it; unless, of course, they are senior officers, when it is more difficult to cope with.

The Navy talk more "shop" than the two other

Services put together. They say they cannot help doing so, because, in a ship, they are never divorced from their work. That may be so, but why should they carry it ashore and allow it to colour their club, or bar-side, conversation ?

From the middle of the afternoon until dusk every man in Malta who is not prevented by duty turns his attention to some form of sport. The Malta Sports Club is the favourite meeting-place, and a thoroughly efficient and excellently run club it is. Here are many hard tennis-courts and squash-courts, a polo ground, a golf course, as well as football and cricket grounds, the whole being set in one of the most charming gardens on the island. Besides this club there is the bathing, of which I have spoken elsewhere, good sailing, and a little riding on the racecourse.

After the games are over the men either drift off to cocktail-parties or into one of the two clubs ; after which they dine, or return to their ships or messes, and so eventually to bed. Such, in very broad outline, is the life we led in Malta, and its counterpart can be found in a hundred other stations abroad.

It is a trite saying that "the tropics or semi-tropics bring out the worst in us", and Malta is not an exception. I have spoken of the trouble that the Service wife can, and does, make by the spoken word, but what about the Service officer ?

He is generally far more savage when pulling to pieces the character of one of his own sex than a woman in a similiar position. He has also far less justification for being, not only unkind, but often downright untruthful, than has a woman. She, with the instincts of her kind, will belittle another for reasons of sex ; in other words, she must try to appear more desirable before men than others of her acquaintance.

In Malta, many times, in bars, messes, and clubs, I have heard one man say to another things which I have known to be grossly unfair concerning a third man, and the reason that lay behind was just a desire to be unpleasant. Here is an example of such defamation.

Jones meets Smith in a club. Jones has just left Brown, whom he dislikes. He asks Smith if he knows him. Should Smith reply that he does not, or that he only knows him slightly, Jones will promptly start to say vague but thoroughly unpleasant things about Brown, some of which may, or may not, be true, as far as he knows. He ends up by saying that Brown is a poisonous fellow.

Smith listens, and is not particularly interested, for he has heard that sort of thing so often before. In due course he departs, and, some days later, he meets the unfortunate Brown, and here comes the grossly unfair part of the business. Smith remem-

bers what Jones has said about Brown, and, in consequence, he is fully prepared to dislike Brown. Should he find some grounds for doing so, he will carry on the condemnation, probably with exaggerations, until the wretched Brown begins to wonder why some of his acquaintances are not so amiable as they had been.

The reader will naturally say that there must be something wrong with Brown. I deny that this is the case. Take conceit as an example. There are very, very few really conceited men, and yet you often hear one man describe another as this. What is mistaken for conceit is often nervousness, or a bad inferiority complex, which shows itself in bursts of self-assertiveness.

II

From the time we, as reinforcements, arrived at Malta, early in September 1935, until well on into the New Year, an unpleasant state of tension existed. The staffs, Naval, Military, and Air Force, knowing the full and critical situation, had become almost hysterical.

The state of affairs, as we saw it, was this. The distance between Malta and Sicily is only fifty-eight miles, and Mount Etna can sometimes be seen on clear days. Italy made it clear that,

if things got out of hand, she had every intention of blowing the garrison off the island and destroying the dockyard, if she could do so—at any rate she was going to have a good try. The result of knowing this was that the Navy had hurried away to a safer place than the Grand Harbour (it generally takes a great ship three hours to get out of this harbour), and only a few destroyers, submarines, and other craft were left to assist in the defence of the island from the sea. We, however, were not so much worried by thoughts of attack from this direction as from the air. It was said, and with truth, that Italy had somewhere about two hundred aeroplanes waiting at Sicily to load up with bombs. These aeroplanes would have taken twenty minutes to reach the island, and, arriving in relays of thirties, flying at great heights, they were to shower their bombs upon our heads and to spray us with gas. Having been bombed on more than one occasion in France, I had no desire to repeat the experience, for the state of insecurity it gives is quite remarkable. We had, of course, anti-aircraft guns and aeroplanes of our own, but they were comparatively few in number.

For over four months we sat and waited, never knowing, from hour to hour, whether we should be subjected to some form of attack, and at a moment's notice.

Feverish preparations for the defence of the island went forward, but most of us felt it was making the best of a poor job. There were those who said that the bombing would do little damage, and that the gas would not be as bad as we expected it to be. But there were people, like myself, who were not so sure. Looking back upon it now, it all seems to have been a hectic and rather tiresome dream.

One of the more irritating sides of the state of emergency was the amount of secret orders and correspondence that was poured out by the staff. To such proportions did it reach that we regimental officers found it difficult to cope with, for there was our normal work to carry out, which had also increased very considerably. Here is an example which is true in every respect.

One morning, amid a pile of letters awaiting my attention on the office desk, were several marked "Secret" in large letters all over the envelopes. One of these was small and thin, and, in addition to being stamped with the ominous sign, had been sealed with wax on the back. I tore it open and read :

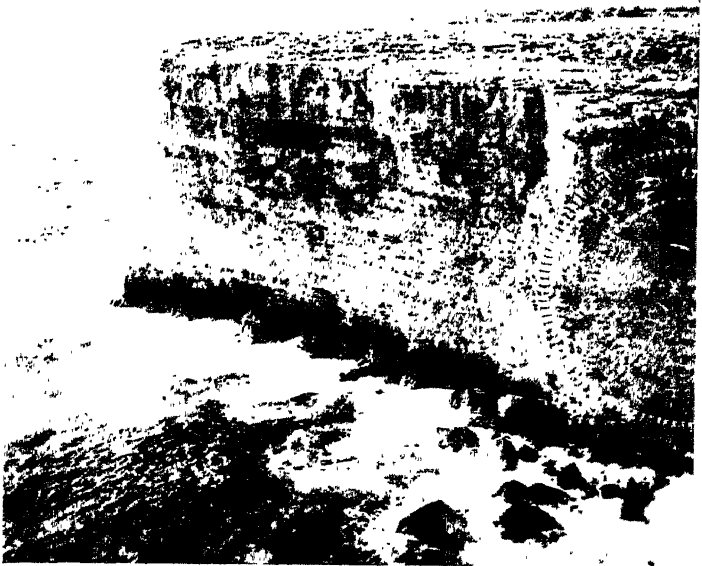
Please say if the four extra latrines which are being constructed in Fort X have been finished and taken into use. Please treat as urgent.

This startled even me, used as I was to the ways of the staff. This letter, because it was marked "Secret", had to be recorded in a special book, given a secret number, and then placed in one of many files which lay in my office safe. The letter in answer, which said "No", had also to be entered in the book, given a number, a copy filed, and the answer itself put in two envelopes, one of which had to be marked "Secret" and properly sealed. This all took time, and as often as not I was faced with ten or a dozen such letters, each of which had to be dealt with by myself in a similar manner.

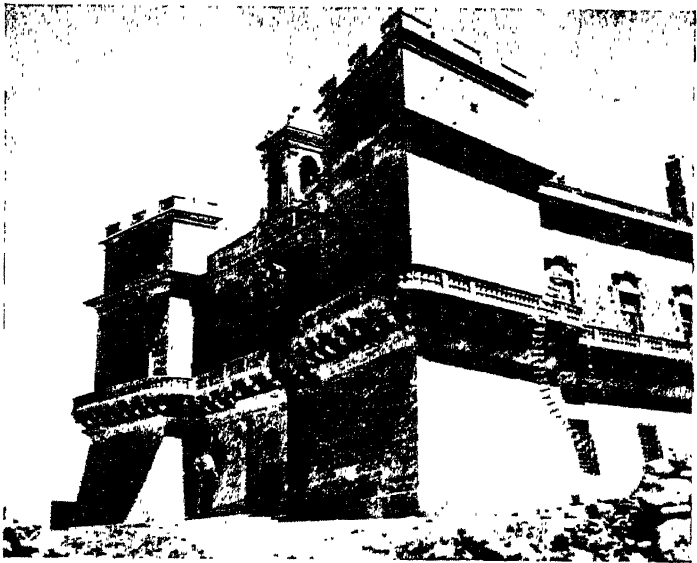
Should a secret or confidential letter become lost or mislaid, and the matter leak out, then arrest and a court martial would be my fate. One unfortunate officer was so found out, but during the trial the missing papers were found between two sheets of blotting-paper in his office. He had been under close arrest for several weeks.

It must not be thought that I am airing a grievance, but this subject has been touched upon to show that life was not all dancing at the Sliema Club and bathing in the warm sea.

Our large and comfortable mess was, during this time, filled to overflowing, and I was given the usual single officer's quarters, which was a large room filled with useful but quite unlovely furniture. There was a celibate's iron bedstead, two



The 400-foot cliffs on the western seaboard of Malta.



The Selmun Palace. Owned by one of the great Maltese nobles.



A PAINTING OF THE GRAND MASTER PINTO

The quaintly shaped hat held by one of the smug pages is of interest.

small tables, both liberally covered in ink-stains, a chest-of-drawers, a washstand and ware, and a vast and hideous wardrobe. There were two chairs, one a hard wooden affair and a supposedly easy one. This latter, however, was unyielding, and so slippery that whenever you leaned back in it you started to slide off. The windows of the room looked out on to a road, and, as a result, were frosted, so that there was no view at all.

For twenty years I have endured the discomfort of such rooms, which those in authority consider so necessary to the martial efficiency of single officers. I revolted. No longer would I endure it ; comfort and pleasant surroundings was what I would have. A place of my own, where other officers' batmen did not whistle and sing, nor officers themselves return in the dead of night, full of wine, and song, and high spirits. If I were going to be blown sky high, then I might just as well experience it at ease.

Having reached the age of discretion, I was not forced to live in the mess if I wished to go elsewhere, that is as long as I did not cost the Government extra money by doing so. The house I chose, after much seeking, was situated only a few yards from the mess, and was of the bungalow type, having a very large flat roof. There were three bedrooms, a sitting-room, dining-room, and the

usual offices, together with a charming little garden at the back and another in the front of the house, which faced a semi-main road.

The house was furnished, and, for Malta, exceptionally well so. My prospective landlord was shrewd, easy of speech, and unshaven, and with restrained politeness on both sides we bargained for several days as to how much I should pay each month in rent. Eventually we met at five pounds ten shillings inclusive. Then followed a checking of the contents of the house, and I, used to checking Army equipment, found several damaged articles whose defects had been cleverly hidden. The landlord smiled sourly.

No sooner was the ink dry upon the agreement than I became involved with the mysterious authorities who deal with gas, electric light, and water, all of whom informed me that I should have to pay them mythical sums each month for supplies and services rendered. Being new to house-keeping, these details had escaped my notice.

In due course my batman and I settled in, and very comfortable we were, for at last I had a place of my own, where I could do and behave as I wished, with no one to say me nay. My meals were taken in the near-by mess, and so servant troubles hardly arose. A spot of bother, however, did occur with my batman, over the question of a

charlady. I insisted that one was necessary, considering it wrong for him to do menial household work. In spite of vocal disapproval on his part, a charlady was installed, and the batman hated her, coming to me with tales of her laziness, carelessness, and general unsatisfactoriness. She departed, and two others took her place. The third remained, for the batman at last realized that I meant what I said.

Being fond of gardening, I got down to putting things in order, and soon plants sprang up and bloomed in an astonishing manner. It was, however, looked upon by acquaintances as being extremely odd on my part that I should do my own weeding and such-like things, when everyone else employed a local gardener to do it for them. When engaged on this work in the front garden, passing friends would leer, some even halting to pass rude remarks.

Speaking of rude remarks, no sooner did it become known, which was instantly, that I had taken a house and was living on my own, instead of staying in the mess in the bachelor quarters, than tongues began to wag. What was said I never learned, but I know my action was regarded with the highest suspicion, and I should not have been at all surprised to have learned that I was holding unseemly orgies, so unmentionable as to be only

hinted at. A few people did stop asking me to their houses, and so I drew my own conclusions, but I should very much have liked to have heard what was said at the various hen-parties and bars.

To return to my gardening. The front garden was the apple of my eye, having many fine blooms in it. One day, on returning from luncheon in the mess, I found it ravished. Gone were some of my finest flowers. Not only were they missing, but the plants themselves had been partly uprooted by vandal hands. Filled with fury, I caused inquiries to be made and found that it was no uncommon thing for passing Maltese children to commit these acts. Later I did happen to see one small brat in the act of stealing a flower, but it was too quick for me, and all the satisfaction I got was a badly barked shin from the leg of my writing-desk as I arose to wreak my vengeance.

Another disaster took place in my front garden after I had been in residence for some weeks. A large and heavy car, in some manner never fully explained, backed suddenly and violently into one of the large square pillars which held the railings, and the havoc it caused was astonishing. The pillar was badly damaged and twisted, a large vase holding a plant was cast down in the garden, wrecking the plants, and, worst of all, my water-supply was cut off. The trouble there was, before the landlord

would carry out the necessary repairs, made me forcibly realize that they are as tiresome as they are said to be. It was six weeks and three days before the work was done, and only then because my rent was due. The fourth letter I wrote to the landlord on the subject stated that until the job was done there would be no cheque from me. The work was completed the following day.

III

Our street was a busy one, and from early morning until late at night it was filled with loud noises. It was always interesting, because so many types of people and things used it. Pedestrians, goats, donkeys, street-vendors, motor-cars, bicycles, and heavy lorries, to say nothing of strolling musicians, soldiers, sailors, and lovely ladies, passed up and down the street at all hours.

The earliest arrival was the milkman, who, making his weird cry of "*Aleeb*" (milk), would come down the roadway shoeing two very over-laden she-goats before him, and it was his call that usually woke me in the mornings. Close upon his heels came the vegetable-sellers, with the curious flat carts piled high with produce, the newspaper-boys, the egg-sellers, and fishmongers ; and each had his own peculiar cry, which generally took the

form of loud and piercing howls. One vegetable-woman, who owned a flat cart drawn by a tiny donkey, used a voice that never ceased to infuriate me every time I heard it, which was often. She used a high-pitched scream which was just not a yell. She was a short, extremely stout peasant, of unprepossessing appearance.

After breakfast came the refuse-collector, who dumped our rubbish into ancient sacks, but what he did with it I do not know. The Maltese still have the unpleasant habit of casting their refuse into the streets, where it lies until swept up. Following the refuse-collector there came, in quick succession, all through the morning, the vendors of such things as braces, saucepans, towels, sea-eggs, door-mats, soap, and underclothes, and a noisy crew they were. Interspersed with their cries was the honking of motor-cars, rumbling of lorries, and braying of asses. How they brayed ! I am told that it is a love-call, and that any female donkey, or ass, that hears it considers it too lovely for words ; but to me it always sounds as if the animals were in torment unbearable.

Speaking of cries reminds me that opposite was a house in which lived an officer and his wife, who owned a young child. It was placed on a verandah exactly facing my sitting-room, and it yelled, without taking breath, from two until four

o'clock every afternoon. Had I not been in fear of mortally offending the couple, I should have complained, but someone else did it for me and the nuisance ceased.

Those who lived in my street were as varied as the houses they lived in. There were generals and other senior officers, low-class Maltese, and the queer family next door. But human beings were not the only occupants, for there was the goat. A large herd of them spent most of the day in a small turning not twenty yards from my house. Let us consider the animal for a space, it being very much a part of the life in Malta.

IV

Goats are milk-providers in most parts of the East and the Near East, and nowhere more so than in Malta. At all hours of the day, at some corner, not on a main road, or being led down one of the side-roads, are the goats, about a dozen in number, in charge of the goat-herd, who may be a man or woman.

They are all females and are animated dairies, for the Maltese housewife demands that her milk shall be delivered fresh and undiluted direct from the factory. The animals are large, hairy creatures, of all shades of white, brown, and black. They are

always in excellent condition and do not smell offensively, although their fouling of the streets in the hot weather, or indeed at any time, is most unpleasant. Their long ears flap and they gaze out on the world with silly, vacant stares, whilst the udders are often so dreadfully distended that they make it very difficult for the animal to walk.

Whilst waiting for customers the herd keep together, scratch themselves against the walls, indulge in mild butting matches, or search for refuse in the gutters, which they somehow manage to pick up through their wire muzzles. Vegetation, in any form, is what they like, but paper bags, stray match-boxes, and cigarette-ends are not scorned.

Maltese matrons have no illusions where milkmen are concerned, and when requiring their daily supply of milk they come to their doors and signal to the nearest goat-herd. He selects one of his animals, takes it by one of its ears, and leads it to his customer, who hands him a glass or jug. The goat is then milked under the eye of the consumer, when it is not easy to dilute the milk whilst watched by a highly suspicious matron, and yet it is sometimes done.

Very few Britons touch the milk, because it was discovered that the very troublesome undulant fever, from which so many people died in the

past, came from this source. Tinned milk is used instead.

The herds when being driven through traffic are surprisingly sensible, and it is rare for an animal to be run into and killed. Should this happen, then the fine, to a Briton, is always five pounds. You may knock down a man and kill him and get away without a fine, but never in the case of a goat. As the country roads are winding and narrow, it can be alarming to round a corner and come face to face with a large herd, and good brakes are a necessity. Goats, however, have been known to leap over one of the stone walls and to land in a passing car, much to the astonishment of everyone concerned.

Mixed up with the herds of goats you now and again see a strange beast which has the body of a sheep, but the legs and head of a goat. These are a species of North African sheep, and sometimes thought, though quite wrongly, to be a cross between a goat and a sheep. I have heard them called Shoats.

Goats remind me of the Sliema Club, perhaps because this is where the human herds are to be found.

CHAPTER VI

STILL MORE LIFE

I

THE Sliema Club. What strange visions this name can conjure up for many, where, under its huge flat roof, men and women of all kinds and degrees have met, danced, and then gone their ways to all parts of the earth. It is safe to say that every member of the three Services who has ever been in Malta, and their name must be legion, knows this club, and has perhaps glided over its floor, clasping something feminine in his arms ; at least he has leaned against its bar or sat upon the wide, cool verandah.

It is an offshoot of the Union Club in Valletta, and is a restaurant-cum-dance-hall-cum-club. Situated facing the sea, not far from the foreshore, it consists of a huge expanse of very slippery stone floor under a flat roof, from which hang lights which are not beautiful. Pillars divide the room into two, one side of which looks out upon a wide verandah ; this, in turn, overlooks the garden and

tennis-courts and a narrow strip of sea. There are several offshoots from the main hall, which are used as bridge, reading, and sitting-rooms ; there is also a dining-room and a bar.

The club, except for a stray member or two, is empty until tea-time, when it begins to fill with those coming in from tennis, or some other form of exercise, and who demand tea. From six-thirty onwards, people gradually drift in to sit at the small tables, either in the hall itself or, in summer, upon the verandah, where it is cool and pleasant. Here they talk, smoke, and drink, or just read the papers. As the evening wears on, others appear from cocktail-parties, in search of a meal and more drink. Then a gramophone plays the latest dirge, and a few couples can be seen sauntering over the floor for the remainder of the evening.

On Saturday nights a full band appears and the club really becomes animated, and when the Fleet is in harbour as many as four hundred people congregate to dance and amuse themselves. Let us join a party on a typical Saturday night and see what happens. I will be one of the guests in a small gathering.

I have been bidden by letter to attend at eight o'clock and, clad in a dinner-jacket (full evening-dress is not worn), I enter the club by the front entrance. Here, just inside, is the hall-porter in his

tiny box, and the official standing behind a table waiting to collect our half-crowns (now shillings, I believe), for it is a club rule that all who dance on Saturday nights must help to pay for the band.

On the right is the way to the men's cloak-room, and, what is far more important, the bar ; on the left is the ladies' cloak-room, known only to us males by the giggles and laughter which come from it. Facing me are the doors which lead directly on to the dance-floor.

Already waiting in the hall are several stray men. I greet some of them and, seeing that my hostess has not yet arrived, go through to the bar for a quick one, hanging up my hat on the way. This, by the way, is an extremely dangerous thing to do if you are fond of your head-gear. Many a goodly hat I have lost here, never to be returned to me.

The quick one, or possibly two, is consumed, and I return to the hall to await the arrival of my hostess. Cars are now rolling up and disgorging parties, the women of which hurry off to the cloak-room to powder their noses, and to carry out other mysterious feminine adjustments.

I wait and wait, smoke another cigarette, and look through on to the dance-floor, which is now covered with tables laid for varying numbers of people, from two up to twenty and more. A

cheerful air hangs over the vases of gay flowers, the white napery, and gleaming cutlery. I wonder if our party is going to be an amusing one, and of whom it will be composed.

A sharp jab in the back causes me to turn and find that a sudden rush of arrivals has taken place, and that the entrance is now packed with people, among whom are my hostess and her niece. She catches my eye and waves as she dashes off to the cloak-room. A large woman, dressed in a flowing gown of black lace, with a bunch of flowers at one shoulder, she is an amiable person of some distinction, who knows everyone and allows little to miss her eye where other people and their doings are concerned. Her niece is a fresh, pretty, unspoiled young girl just out from an English village, and her aunt has promised her mother to do what she can for her ; the present party is fulfilling that promise.

Our hostess appears once again, and in a skilful manner collects her party, and we are swept into the dance-hall and across to a table which has been well chosen so that it commands most of the room. Whilst arranging where we shall sit, our hostess makes the necessary introductions, and I find that I know everyone present. We sit down. At the head of the table is the hostess, with myself on her left. On her right is a naval officer who is tall,

fair, and very good-looking, and wears an air of being quite at home in a palace. Next to him is the niece. On my right is a tall, thin woman with a face which is long and rather stupid, and crowded with a mass of light brown hair which is going grey. She is a woman of title, perhaps brought in to add distinction to the party, and who has a bitter tongue when she chooses to use it. At the end of the table is a captain in a line regiment, who is a dark, thick-set, somewhat stolid person, with a clipped moustache and a pair of grey eyes which twinkle.

Sherry is now produced, and whilst it is being drunk most of the other tables near-by fill up, and an animated murmuring rises up on all sides. Our hostess, taking in the turn-out and behaviour of all the new-comers, throws out remark after remark, either to the naval officer or myself.

Did we go to the races at the Marsa that afternoon? Was not the dust too awful? What band was going to play to us? Then, laying a hand on my arm in some excitement, she says :

"Look ! Who is that girl who has just come in with Commander——? I saw her at the races today."

I look in the direction indicated and, seeing who the girl is, I smile.

"My dear lady ! Didn't you know ? That's his wife."

Our hostess, by no means shaken by this information : "Well, I must say she is charming. Do you know her?"

"Yes, slightly."

"Well, bring her over and introduce me later on."

Dinner now proceeds in the manner of such meals. The naval officer talks to the niece, who is shy and obviously a little overcome by the general comeliness of her companion. I waggle my head to and fro as I try to carry on a conversation with my hostess and the woman of title, both of whom demand my attention, whilst the infantryman at the end of the table gets a word in with the niece whenever he is able to do so.

Waiters hurry to tables, carrying trays of food and drink, and a babel of conversation rises up on all sides. It is indeed a cheerful and animated scene. But who would think, when watching the gay throng, with its smartly dressed women and well-groomed men, its wine and laughter, that deceit and shamelessness hovers over some of these diners?

Opposite to us is a table for two, at which there are a young man and a woman. She is dressed in a tight-fitting gown of pale-green satin, and her oval face is the colour of ivory, whilst her lips are scarlet. The nails on her fingers look as if they had been

dipped in blood, and her smooth black hair is perfectly dressed. She is married, but her husband is away from the station, and with her is the latest young man, who is flattered and fascinated by her attention, for she is undoubtedly one of the more outstanding women in the room.

Any day of the week this couple can be seen dining, dancing, or driving a car together. When the husband returns, the young man will be quietly dropped. I happen to know that there is nothing particularly wrong in this case, and that the woman is just lonely and misses male attention. But see what follows.

My hostess catches my glances at the table in question and she smiles. The woman of title also notices our interest, and she leans down the table.

"Disgusting, I call it," she says in a fierce whisper. "If I were her husband I'd horse-whip her."

Our hostess nods, but the naval officer seems embarrassed, whilst the niece flushes and looks down at her plate. There is a pause, and then the hostess says to the table in general, for she evidently has pangs of conscience :

"The trouble with us here in Malta is, we spend too much of our time noting other people's actions, and in the rush to hide our own faults air those we suspect in others. Take that woman over there,

for example. It isn't really our affair what she does. If her husband doesn't know all about her, then he's a fool ; if he does and condones it, then that is his business."

"A study of one's fellow-beings and their actions is always of interest to intelligent people," I say.

The naval officer now joins in the conversation.

"Yes, that's true. But if you do that, surely you can suppress the bad, and only comment on the good you see?"

The woman of title, not perhaps unnaturally, takes this as a shaft directed at herself.

"The voice of public opinion, young man," she says firmly, "is, now and again, the only thing that will keep some people within the bounds of common decency."

The atmosphere is now becoming a little strained and so I tell what I think is an amusing story.

"That reminds me," I say to the table in general. "A most amusing thing happened to me last week. I was at a cocktail-party at the —— Palace, where I was introduced to a very pretty and smart young woman. She was sitting on the edge of a chester-field, drinking sherry. It appeared that she had only recently come to the island, so I asked her whether her husband was in the Army or the Navy. And what do you think she said in reply?"

The table leaned forward to hear.

"She looked at me coolly and said, 'My husband is in the Rifle Brigade'."

I am rewarded with laughter, and the atmosphere becomes normal once again.

Dinner continues and draws to an end. People get up from their tables and move across to where, in one of the offshoots of the main hall, other tables have been reserved for them. The ladies from our table also rise, and go off to powder their noses, whilst we men drift over to search for our particular table. The band arrives, and takes up its position on a dais between two of the pillars in the middle of the room. Fresh parties are now pouring into the club from private dinners, or from their own houses, where they have had a quiet meal alone.

In a short space of time the dinner-tables are swept away and the band strikes up the first dance. Slowly, but surely, the dance-floor becomes more and more crowded with a moving throng which is as varied in composition as any you could find at home. Old men and young women, tall girls with short men, fat men with slim girls, all are there. Soldiers, sailors, and marines ; clergymen, lords, and ladies ; a sprinkling of the Maltese nobility, and those holding minor posts in the dockyard, guide their partners over the very slippery floor to the tunes of a self-pitying dirge.

Before the naval officer has a chance, I slip in and ask the niece to dance, and so, moving away from our table, we become ungulfed. As we move over the floor I notice many glances are thrown at my partner, of which she is entirely unconscious. She is thoroughly enjoying what, for her, is a novel and highly entertaining evening. Looking down at her clear, fresh face, eager and young, with unclouded eyes, I wonder how long these things will last. Cocktails, late nights, and a good deal of male attention may quickly change them.

Let us look at those who are moving with us. Near-by is a jolly, round-faced, very smart young married woman, who is as nice as her very suitable husband, who is actually steering her (there is a pun here for those who know). But whom do we see beyond? A young woman we know well, and craftily avoid at all times. She is dancing with what she fervently hopes is a potential husband, for she is determined to marry someone. By no means unpleasing to look at, she is, however, a snare and a delusion, for her methods are subtle, and not at all obvious to the young men who respond to her carefully considered flattery and attention. I wonder if the man with whom she is now dancing knows of the danger he is in, for he is one of our more eligible bachelors.

On and on we go, and the band croons mourn-

fully. We pass, and smile at, a tall, slim, good-looking young woman, who is splendidly robed, and whose hair is a mass of tiny, fair curls. She has, I realize, cooed her husband into bringing her, or allowing her to come this evening, for he has no use for ball-dancing and such-like frivolities. Later, no doubt, I shall meet him in the bar, where he will be talking "shop" or sport to another such husband.

The band hoots like a trodden-on duck, and the dance ends. Everyone stands and calls for an encore—to do otherwise is to slight your partner—and many of us males furtively wipe a damp brow. By my right shoulder is a gay little woman with the most infectious of high spirits, whose kind heart and cheerfulness are welcomed at many a party. She is one of those blessed people who get no pleasure whatsoever from saying unkind things, and she can pass the most outrageous remarks in a mixed company, and no one will mind in the very least.

Later in the evening I dance with my hostess, who is slightly elephantine in her movements, and is distracting, because she must throw a remark at each person she knows, on passing them. I also find myself rather inclined to sink into her ample bosom, which, to say the least of it, is embarrassing.

The woman of title is my next partner, but she

will have no close embraces, and keeps her distance. This is even more upsetting than with my late partner, for other couples, bumping into us, cause me to close in on my partner suddenly and violently, to spring away when opportunity permits.

The dance over, I excuse myself and make for the bar. On the way, and close to the door leading to it, is a table at which are seated several comely young men, who are drinking champagne and sitting aloof from the rest of the herd. As they are in the habit of doing this nearly every Saturday night, I wonder if the reason is that they are interested in studying the animated scene, or just like being admired. I prefer not to say what I suspect, for I am known to them all.

In the bar there is a large crowd of men, many of whom are merry, and a babel of talk is taking place in an atmosphere thick with cigarette-smoke. One young man is standing champagne to all and sundry, and already nine bottles of a most expensive brand have become dead men. As soon as he sees me I am embraced in a brotherly fashion, and pressed to accept a tumbler full of champagne. My laughing refusal is taken as a personal affront, and the hospitable one's eyes begin to glitter with annoyance, and so I am forced to take it.

Engulfed in a flood of acquaintances, and almost before I realize what is happening, I become in-

volved in a friendly but heated argument with a large and amiable staff officer. We talk "shop" with complete shamelessness. I comment on the curious workings of the average staff officer's mind.

"I am a poor, hard-worked, under-paid regimental officer," I say in the course of the argument, "whom every staff officer thinks he can tread on. Staff officers are only glorified clerks, and bad ones at that. You have only to look back over the last few weeks to see that. And yet, because they sit in an office at headquarters, they think they are little tin gods, to whom I should bow down. How you expect me to deal with your floods of correspondence is beyond my comprehension. But, of course, you wouldn't understand, because most of you have been so long out of touch with us."

The staff officer grins, and is in no way upset by these outspoken remarks, and he replies equally forcibly. Suddenly I realize that I have been away far too long from my party, and that I have drunk at least four large glasses of champagne. With difficulty I break away and return to the dance-floor, and pass the remainder of the evening in a rosy haze.

The hour grows late, the band plays its last encore, and gradually the more staid of us fade away to leave others to carry on the dance to the gramophone.

Outside is the cool, starlit night, and in the distance my inviting bed. And so ends another Saturday night.

On reading through what I have written, I see that I have not mentioned the cool, dark garden below the club verandah. But no, it is better not. Those who wander here on a Saturday night are liable to be startled, if not shocked.

II

As the weather became warmer I turned my attention to bathing. After the usual forty minutes' doze after luncheon, I flung on a shirt and a pair of shorts and went down to Tigne. Here is a sketch of the bathing at this spot, and it is typical of any warm afternoon.

Bathing in Malta is as good as any that can be had in Europe. It is, however, mainly from rocks straight into deep water, there being only one or two remote bays which have sandy beaches. The water is always crystal clear, and in summer is of a warm silkiness, the temperature rising to seventy-eight degrees towards the end of the season.

Everyone bathes from June until October. Old people, and tiny things that can hardly walk, go down and enter the water, each in their own particular manner. Some slide, seal-like, into the

sea from a convenient rock, others dive into it from great heights.

Tigne is the most favoured bathing-place, for here there are regular establishments, where you can swim, sun-bathe, have meals, and generally behave as people do when they are close to the sea. The soft, beige-coloured rocks have been partly levelled, and well-appointed dressing-rooms and showers built on the platforms on the uppermost rocks.

Tigne is divided into three sections : for men, children, and women, occupants of which are not supposed to visit each other. The men's side is known as Cannibal Island, and women, quite rightly, are absolutely forbidden to come near it, for between three-thirty and five-thirty it can be packed with very semi-nude masculine figures, lying in twenty different postures.

Diving-boards here are placed both high and low, but I myself have always had a rooted objection to casting myself head first off anything, whatever its height. But, of course, to slide into the water is not done, and so, at Tigne, I fell in, from a board about six inches above the level of the water.

Let us stand, for a moment, on the new concrete platform at Tigne, lean over the rails, and look down. It is four-thirty and the place is fairly crowded.

To our left are three young naval officers lying in deck-chairs, their pleasantly browned bodies partially draped. One, clad in a pair of triangular slips, has a towel round his head ; another is lying with his back turned to the sun, for he is evidently not satisfied with its colour ; whilst the third is pouring out tea for the others, which has just been brought down to him by a Maltese boy. They have already had their swim, and after tea will have another before dressing.

Scattered about the various levels are men in deck-chairs, where some read, others lie back and doze, and a few sit and watch the small sailing-boats skimming across the breeze-ruffled, blue sea. Lying on a piece of matting and stretched out on his back is a personage whose middle has expanded considerably. We wonder, as we look at him, if by creeping up and giving the protuberance a hearty slap it would boom like a drum.

There is a constant coming and going from the water. Men dive off the boards, with varying degrees of skill, and swim out to where a raft is moored well away from the rocks ; others emerge dripping, and come up the steps towards us. They are of all ages, and degrees, and types, but each must brown his body as swiftly and as comfortably as he can. To be untanned is almost indecent, and not to be borne. The browning process,

however, cannot be unduly rushed, for dire are the consequences to those who sit, at first, too long in the hot sun. Chests, backs, and shoulders in such cases can quickly turn to the colour of ripe tomatoes, and be as painful as a bad scald, as many a vain sun-bather knows to his cost.

We will now go down the steps, turn to the left, and cross the children's section. Seated either under the shade of a reed-shed or in the sun are the mothers and nannies, and, crowding about them, their charges, having the time of their lives. Two square pools have been cut in the rock, one of a few inches in depth of water and the other a foot and more. Tiny fragments of truly delightful humanity, clad in miniature costumes, are being induced to enter the water of their own free will. Some leap into it, but others howl rebelliously. Some gather in pairs or threes, and play their mysterious and highly romantic games, which now and again end in turbulence and tears.

We pass close to a young golden-brown male of about three years, who is showing definite signs of the original sin which is in him. Having been told by his nanny to refrain from some act, he is asserting himself. He scowls horribly, casts his spade and bucket in different directions, and indicates that he has no intention, whatsoever, of doing what he is told. The nanny wearily puts

down the mysterious garment she is knitting and gets out of her chair and she picks up this rebellious male. He promptly screams his defiance, but is quickly brought into subjection by awful threats, known only to nannies.

The storm is now over, and the boy, after finding his bucket and spade, toddles off to assert himself with a delightful, but equally minute, piece of feminine charm near-by. The nanny returns to her chair and we continue our walk to enter what is forbidden territory, namely, the women's side at Tigne, which we may only enter by direct invitation. What wondrous sights greet our eyes, as we climb the slippery steps and put foot on the levelled rocks, which are strewn with female forms displaying their charms. Lovely ladies in exotic costumes—how exotic can only be grasped by actually seeing them—display large expanses of soft, tanned back. Scarlet, crimson, blue, and even green toe-nails startle us, and seductive curves, skilfully accentuated by cleverly-made costumes, ravish our eyes.

Is that a butterfly we see on that shapely shoulder? Yes, there is no doubt it really is there. Goodness! There is another painted on that marble-like thigh—we had better turn our eyes away lest still more disturbing sights be met with. From all directions eyes—grey, green, black, and

blue—regard us, and, filled with embarrassment, we turn towards where, in the middle distance, are two rafts. On them, and swimming near-by, are be vies of young women, who, if possible, look more attractive in the water than out of it. No, it is much better that we turn away and go home to tea. If we stay here, there is no knowing what might happen.

Bathing in Malta has, however, its snares in the same way that it has at home. In England it may be pebbles to tender toes, or biting east winds ; in the tropics the lurking shark, the deadly sea-snake, or that remarkably unpleasant fish the baracouda, which can turn men into eunuchs. In Malta the snag is the sea-egg.

If you can imagine a small, plump pin-cushion tightly packed with large darning-needles, with all their points outwards, you will have some idea of what this creature is like. It is a rich brown in colour and its spikes are very brittle.

The sea-water is fortunately very clear, and if you look carefully you can generally spot the lurking sea-egg some three or four feet below the surface as it sticks to a ledge or rock. They vary in size, but can grow as large as an apple, including, of course, their spikes.

On many of the small and delightful bays and inlets all round the coast picnic parties are held, both by day and night. Moonlight picnicking is a

favourite pastime in the hot weather. It is usually on one of these picnics that some gay, inconsequential, or forgetful bather comes to grief. He dives off a rock, and in due course is bidden to join the remainder of the party at the feast. To do this he has to leave the water, but his mind, intent on tea, or beer, has forgotten the possible sea-egg. He cheerfully swims to the most convenient rock and proceeds to scramble out of the sea. Suddenly the happy revellers above are startled by prolonged roars of anguish. Galvanized into action, they rush down and drag out the unfortunate and incautious one. The ball of one of his feet is examined and found to be a mass of broken, brown needles driven well into the flesh. Each has to be dug out separately, and the extraction is extremely painful as well as undignified. Many people with a perverted sense of humour think it a happy jest until they themselves are caught.

Fortunately, the sea-egg is not very numerous in the more shallow water, for the Maltese catch them, boil, and eat them. They are said to closely resemble an egg. You are led to speculate as to how a sea-egg shows affection towards its mate.

There is yet one more snare in regard to bathing in Malta, and which can be quite as painful as the sea-egg. If some form of ear protection is not used in the ears, the very salt water can, on drying,

crack the inner skin of the walls of the ear, which becomes inflamed.

Moonlight bathing-picnics frequently take place during the summer months and the most is made of the glamorous nights. I will take you on a *purely imaginary* one and we will see what happens.

A party of fourteen people has been bidden, either by letter or telephone, to meet at seven-thirty at the club, or someone's house, and everyone who has a car is asked to bring it. The organizers of these feasts are invariably young women, married or otherwise, who, when you arrive at the rendezvous, are in a state of great agitation. Running to and fro, they sort out the various baskets, boxes, and bundles which contain the food, and they make sure that none of the drinks are missing. These important details settled, there comes the disturbing problem of who shall ride in which car. I always suspected that this had been secretly arranged beforehand, but a less cynical person might be led into believing otherwise, judging by the amount of talk and argument that take place before all is arranged.

The spot selected for the picnic is a tiny bay some fifteen miles away on the north-western side of the island, where there is a half-moon-shaped stretch of sand at the bottom of a high cliff. All is ready at last, and the cars move off one by one into the soft, rose-coloured glow from a dying sunset,

but a few clouds are gathering and a cool breeze is growing stronger every moment.

I find myself sitting in the back of a small saloon car beside a young woman about whom I have no illusions. She is a bright, brazen young female who knows what she wants and asks for it. Why she should have picked upon me is a mystery. We talk amiably about nothing at all as the car bowls along the excellent roads, and some of my suspicions concerning the intentions of my companion begin to fade. Towards the end of the journey the car turns off into a narrow country lane whose surface is very bad, and we in the back are bounced to and fro. All my suspicions return with renewed force and become certainties, also I feel rather sick from the motion of the car.

As I wonder how I am to handle the situation, the car, with two final bumps, comes to a standstill, and we have arrived. I skip lightly and hastily out of it and help out the young woman who, although thwarted, shows no sign of discomfiture. The remaining cars appear at short intervals on the small, flat space which overlooks the steep cliff.

It is now dark and the moon hidden behind a cloud, whilst the breeze has become almost a cold wind. Weighed down with food and drink, we move down a path whose surface resembles that of a dry mountain torrent. People flash torches and giggle,

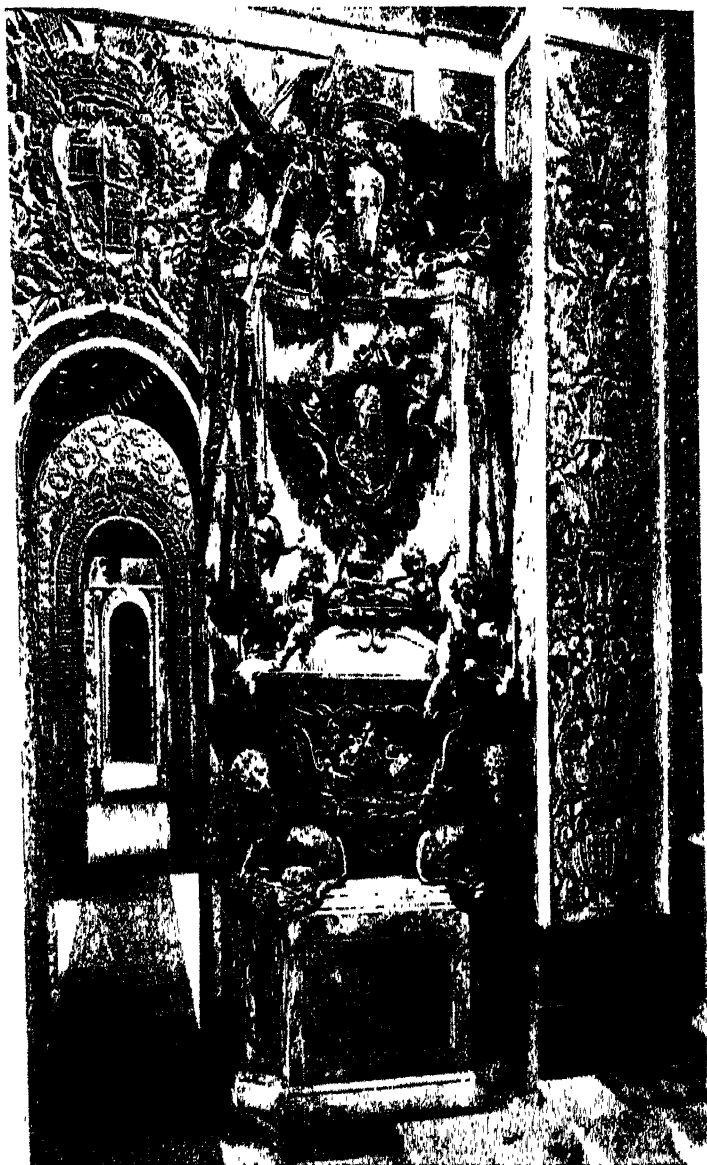
but all arrive safely at the bottom with the food and drink intact. Much loud-voiced argument now takes place as to the exact spot on the sand where we shall feed. This is settled by myself and a naval officer putting down our loads and saying we are going to remain where we are.

The remainder of the party promptly put down what they have been carrying and start to throw off their clothes, under which are bathing-costumes. Much astonishment is caused by two others and myself remaining fully clad. I state that nothing will make me go into the sea without a warm sun to cheer my shuddering body. Rude and personal remarks are passed before the bathers rush down the sand in a body and throw themselves into the water.

Lying on the still warm sand and smoking a cigarette, I call the attention of my companions to the loveliness of the night. A full moon is now flooding the bay with light. The cliffs opposite, however, are jet black and their tops slash the sapphire sky. A faint breeze is wafted down the slope, carrying with it a perfume from some hidden flowers or grasses. The sea is delightfully stippled, and heaves gently as if it were breathing in deep sleep. The tiny waves breaking on the shore are liquid silver and they gurgle and laugh in their own froth. The bathers, as they stand half in and half



A typical scene in the Grand Harbour. These places are full of caves and mysterious steps which do not, today, appear to lead anywhere.



This gives an idea of the ornate interior of St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta. It is a tomb of one of the Grand Masters.

out of the water, glitter in a fantastic manner, and their voices and laughter come clearly. One by one they come up dripping from the sea to snatch up towels and portions of clothing, and vanish to dry and dress themselves.

It is after nine o'clock before everyone has gathered in a rough circle on the sand about the food, which is spread out in bewildering array. Sand, however, seems to have got into most things, and a girl who is late runs up and, in her haste to join the group, steps upon a particularly juicy pie. Her loud wails cause much amusement, and a man picks up a napkin and wipes the small, pink foot.

Beer, gimlets, whisky, and brandy are now being poured out, and each person presses his neighbour to eat. Sandwiches of a dozen different varieties, pies, fish, tongues, and salads sit among the cakes, biscuits, trifles, and cheese, and it is astonishing how rapidly they vanish. Everyone is cheerful, and soon the drink and the moon begin to exert their influences.

The meal ends almost abruptly and the party rapidly diminishes to split up into couples who wander away along the sand, where they lie on their faces very close to each other. My companion of the car suggests that we also might go for a stroll, but I shy violently and say that I am far too

replete to move. She sits down beside me, with one knee in a salad, and leans against my shoulder and says that I am rather a pet. I accept this doubtful compliment in silence, and she absent-mindedly picks up a small handful of sand which she allows to dribble down on to my hair. There is nothing more I detest than sand in my hair, and I say so. In reply, she pushes the remainder down my neck. She is asking for trouble and gets it. I turn, push her on to her back and rub her head vigorously in the sand. She screams and calls for help. In a moment several men have come to her rescue. Emerging from a seething mass, considerably ruffled, with sand in my mouth, ears, and nose, I depart to a safe distance and hurl insults at my aggressors. They hunt me, but soon give it up and return to their flirtations.

A young, perfectly safe matron joins me on a rock and we smoke cigarettes in silence. From what I have said I feel the reader, not without cause, will consider me a bit of a prig. I also should have been lying on the sand close beside the young female who had chosen me for her amusement. Not to do so means that I am not pulling my weight in the party. Excuses or explanations are never satisfactory, but I might say that I am old-fashioned enough to like to do certain things in private.

The matron and I then talk bridge. We say how much we detest husbands and wives who snap and snarl at each other across the table, and we discuss the bridge fiends we both know and avoid. Later, my watch shows that it is past eleven o'clock, and so the matron and I return to the ruins of the feast and start to pack it up.

It is twelve-thirty before we toil up the path to the cars, for there are those in the party who are of the type who can never have enough of anything. When a move has been suggested they want to bathe again, to eat—in fact do anything to delay departure. At the car-park I find that my companion of the outward journey has managed to get me transferred to the dicky seat of a small two-seater of extreme age. Here I scramble in to sit tightly wedged beside yet another young woman.

The drive home is unpleasant. It is extremely chilly in spite of the rugs, and my companion ardently desires to flirt with me. With her left hand she tightly clasps my right under the rug, and with her left she clutches her hat, but she finds it difficult to be romantic when cold, wind-blown, and tired.

In due course I am dropped at my abode, whilst the others go on to finish the night by dancing to a gramophone in the Sliema Club.

III

The most popular form of entertainment in Malta is the drinking-party. This parades under a variety of names, such as Cocktail Party, At Home, Sherry, Sherry at 6.30, Band Sunday, and even Gin Sunday. The party can be held in a number of different places such as clubs, private houses, or flats ; in ships, warships, and officers' messes ; also on a roof, in a garden, on deck, in a ward-room, or under the muzzles of gigantic guns. But, wherever held, and by whoever given, the type of party rarely varies. Guests are herded together, offered weak cocktails, cigarettes, and a variety of small things to eat. You meet the same people evening after evening at these parties, and they talk about the same old topics : the house or place you happen to be in at the moment ; the weather ; the game or sport which is in vogue at the time ; who has arrived on, or departed from, the island, has become engaged or been seen at the Sliema Club ; when you expect to go Home ; and, finally, always what the Navy is doing, or about to do.

The drinking-party is, naturally, popular, for it is possible to entertain a large number of people at a comparatively small cost, and, what is even more important, the guests amuse themselves

without any particular efforts being expended on the part of the hosts. They may vary in size, from four or five guests up to three and four hundred, and the cost per head generally works out to two or three shillings, or even less.

There are, however, two things which must be looked to if the party is to be voted a success. The first is that all available floor space must be so tightly packed with guests that they can hardly breathe, let alone drink or eat, and secondly, there must be a properly organized men's bar to which the male guest, if he so desires, can retire. The latter is costly, but it evens itself out fairly well, for the man who drinks half a bottle of whisky or gin will be balanced by several women who take only lemon-squash or some such cheap drink.

It is a mistake to think that, by going to such parties in Malta, you will always meet some new and interesting acquaintance. This rarely takes place, for the hosts are far too busy, or indifferent, to bother about making suitable introductions. A hostess who has, however, a lone girl upon her hands will introduce her to the nearest man, and he is left with her the whole evening, no matter how dull or tiresome she may be. All the hostess cares about is that she has found someone to take her off her hands for the time being. If you do not hit it off, then it is just too bad.

I am not suggesting that all parties are indifferently run in Malta, for that would not be true. I have been to many, and especially those given by the Maltese, where I had a thoroughly good time from every point of view. The trouble lies in the fact that many hosts think that, because they gather together a crowd of people in their house, give them indifferent cocktails and a few *hors-d'œuvres*, they have done their duty, and that each of their guests will, in due course, return the tepid hospitality, with, if they are lucky, something more substantial, perhaps even a dinner.

Much of what I have said is not so much due to meanness on the part of hosts as to lack of forethought. Parties, like letters, should clearly show the individuality of the originator, if they are to be successful. One good, well-run party is far better than many poor ones : this may seem to be a perfectly obvious fact, but it is often forgotten.

Regimental Sherry Parties, given in a mess after church on Sundays, are always interesting, and invitations to them are much sought after, women especially favouring them, it being one of the few occasions upon which they are allowed to enter an officers' mess.

A band plays and a very varied assortment of people crowd into the ante-rooms and on to the verandahs. Soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen ;

clergymen, Government officials even to the very highest, British residents of social standing, and a sprinkling of the Maltese nobility, all circulate in what is an animated scene. Waiters dash to and fro carrying almost every known kind of drink, the air becomes thick with smoke, and the hum of conversation resembles the sound from a huge and very agitated beehive. Few listen to the band outside, even if they could hear it, but it plays valiantly on.

Towards the end of the party you hear such remarks as these :

"My dear, a wonderful party. Thank you so much."

"Where is John ? We must go or we shall be late for luncheon, and we have got some people coming. Do go and find him, my dear. He is sure to be where the drink is flowing fastest."

"Such a lovely party. Isn't your colonel a pet ? . . . What, you don't think so ? Well, you know best."

"It was a grand show. Thanks so much. No. No more, thanks. Yes, I am quite sure."

IV

Whilst in Malta I twice went on exercises with the Navy, and both were unusual occasions. The

first was in a large submarine which was hunted by destroyers.

We slid out of harbour on the surface, and when well clear I was told to go below because we were going to dive. Clambering down an aperture the size of a large coal-hole in a pavement, I found myself in a restricted space which was more closely packed with a strange assortment of gear than I could have imagined possible. Pipes of all types and sizes ran in every direction like intoxicated snakes out on the spree ; wheels, big and small, protruded from unexpected places ; there were gauges and dials, valves and turn-cocks, besides handles, levers, and gongs ; and last, but by no means least, were the two great periscopes hanging from the roof.

Officers, petty officers, and seamen moved about unceasingly in this space, the size of a large bathroom, and I stood humbly in a corner and tried hard not to get in the way. The conning-tower was closed with a loud bang and I knew what it felt like to be a sardine in its tin. Seamen were now seated before dials, or stood ready to turn wheels or handles, whilst a young lieutenant-commander stood between the periscopes and took charge. He uttered strange cries, such as "Flood Kingston 'Y'. Open Cuba 'B'," and men, galvanized into action, madly turned whatever

happened to be closest to them, or so it appeared to me.

Close at hand was a huge dial whose pointer started to move. It read 10 fathoms, then 15, 20, and finally 25, which I knew meant we were 150 feet below the surface, but except for that dial I should not have known we had left it.

The excitement died away and I came out of my corner and talked to the officer in charge, who told me that we were slipping along at a good pace and striving to elude the destroyers, who were hunting for us like hounds who have lost the scent. Suddenly my companion let out a violent oath, and I asked the cause.

"Didn't you hear that?" he inquired.

"Hear what?" I replied, much mystified.

"Listen."

I did so, but could hear nothing unusual.

"There! You heard that?"

I did, and it was a curious "ping" on the hull of the submarine, which sounded just as if a giant had flicked it with a finger. Several more came in quick succession.

"They've found us! Damn 'em!" snarled the officer, and left me to consult with others near by.

I learned later that the "pings" were caused by the destroyers dropping tiny depth-charges, whose explosions vibrated on our hull and told us that our

position had been located. It was then I could hear the eerie sound from the roaring propellers far above us, where the destroyers were rushing about like excited terriers.

The lieutenant-commander returned to his place and gave out a fresh series of orders, with the result that the great dial once more started to move. Very slowly, and with long pauses, it mounted to forty-nine fathoms (294 feet) and there it stayed.

"I bet they don't find us again," said my companion, with deep satisfaction. "We are lying doggo very nearly on the bottom, and there should be a sound-proof layer of water above us."

He then suggested that I might like to look over the rest of the vessel. On my saying that I should like to do so, he detailed a petty officer to conduct me over the various compartments. Creeping, crawling, and waddling on bent knees, I went through many doors, and was shown the engine-room, the great electric storage batteries, the torpedo-tubes; and everywhere there was the complicated mass of machinery, so that I marvelled that any collection of men, let alone one man, could grasp what it all meant, how it worked, or was put right if it failed to function. The living-quarters were cupboards, where the officers' bunks closely resembled coffins—a nasty, suggestive thought.

On our return to the control-room I was led off

to the ward-room for gin, where several glasses of it were drunk, but no smoking was allowed. Lunch was being prepared close by on a tiny cooker, presided over by a perspiring seaman. The meal was excellent, and when eating it I was fully conscious of the unusual occasion, for few landsmen have had a full-course meal when just under 300 feet below the surface of the sea.

The atmosphere becoming very stuffy, we returned to the control-room, where it was almost normal. How that submarine leaked! Water was now spouting in tiny streams from all over the hull, but the periscopes were the worst, for the water here was actually pouring in. I was told the cause was due to the terrific pressure upon the ship at that great depth.

We were not located again and, in due course, very slowly and cautiously we returned to the surface. This was an anxious and ticklish business, for to rise up in the path of an advancing destroyer can have horrid and disastrous consequences.

My second experience with the Navy was of a very different nature and far more alarming. I was invited to go in H.M.S. *Resolution* and watch her carry out battle-practice with fifteen-inch guns.

A small launch took me out of the Grand Harbour into a very rough sea, for the battleship was lying well out. Just when I was beginning to

wonder how much longer I could hold out (being seasick in front of sailors is a very humiliating business), I was invited to climb up a swaying rope-ladder hung against the vast sides of the ship. I made an effort, but, as the launch was behaving like an excited puppy and the ladder evaded every attempt to grasp it, I became desperate, for a rope-ladder, at the best of times, is not easy to negotiate. Sailors and officers were lining the deck-rails and I was acutely aware of my awkward position. I made a wild grab, caught the ladder, and was promptly left hanging half in and half out of the launch, and in danger of being squashed quite flat against the side of the ship. My ascent of that ladder must have resembled that of a drunken ape, but at last I stood on the huge deck and sighed with relief. Incidentally, people above and below me had shouted advice which I had been far too agitated to heed, and on my arrival the broad grins of the seamen, and the polite expressions of regret from the officers, were not lost upon me.

Led to the ward-room and revived with gin, I appeared again on deck to find that Malta had faded almost entirely away, and that to the north were two huge, square targets. I was asked whether I wished to witness the shooting from a gun-turret or from above. I said that I would like to go aloft.

A young, pink, and shy sub-lieutenant took me up to the admiral's bridge, in which there was room for about four people. Whilst we waited for things to happen, my efforts to make conversation could not be called a success, for every remark I made was greeted with a deep blush and a stuttered answer.

The great guns slowly swung round and I was told the practice was to begin. Just when I was not ready, all the four fifteen-inch guns fired simultaneously. The explosion caused by those guns was far beyond my wildest nightmares, the whole world seeming to dissolve into a mass of flame and thick yellow smoke. I was actually lifted well off my feet and shaken to the innermost core of my being, and the great ship staggered and slowly recovered. Before I had time to pull myself together the guns, two fore and two aft, fired again, and yet again, and each time I was blinded, deafened, and every nerve in my body rose up and telegraphed how much it objected to this treatment.

In spite of my agitation I watched the great fountains of water which were flung up by the shells close to the targets, which, however, did not appear to suffer any damage. A tactful remark on this subject later on in the ward-room brought to light the fact that it was not meant actually to hit them. Needless to say, I did not express the doubt I felt of the truth of this statement.

After it was all over I turned, on the bridge, to find the sub-lieutenant with a woebegone face, and learned that his expensive cap had been blown off his head with the first blast and had gone to scare the fishes. I had been wiser, having put down my chin-strap. I then noticed that a large and heavy swinging compass had been lifted out of its brackets and flung on to the deck, and this, I think, more than anything else, illustrates the force of those explosions.

I retired to the ward-room once more. It is astonishing what an excellent restorative gin can be.

v

The Opera House in Valletta is a fine pile where many of the performances given are worthy of the building. The interior is Continental in design, there being only boxes and stalls, which is unsatisfactory, for you can only see in comfort from those boxes which face the stage, and the stalls are inclined to be draughty.

Each winter a company comes over from Italy and remains until February, and its very varied repertoire includes many of the lesser-known operas. I have listened to some in this theatre whose very names I had never heard before, and excellent a few of them were.

For the sum of four-and-sixpence you can get a good stall, and, if such things appeal to you, can attend most days of the week, Sundays included. Why do we not have opera on Sundays in England? Concerts are allowed, and yet what is opera but an elaborate concert?

On gala nights, and what are termed English Nights, the Governor often appears, and then the parade between the acts is a gay and charming scene, where the women turn out in their finest raiment and the Army is resplendent in its mess-kits, whilst the gold braid on the uniforms of some of the more senior naval officers is positively dazzling. These nights are popular, for it is then that some of the Lordly Ones condescend to notice those more humble.

The standard of the performances is a high one, and there must be few other places in Europe where you can hear good opera so cheaply. Unfortunately, at least for me, many of the nights were ruined by the behaviour of certain portions of the audience, whose manners were deplorable. They arrived late, stamped down the gangways, trod on your feet, and then returned after the intervals long after the curtain had gone up. This might have been endured, but they also committed the heinous crime of talking in loud whispers; they fidgeted, dropped glasses, rustled, opened

chocolate boxes, and behaved generally as if they were at a revue at Home. This, I am sorry to say, was confined mainly to the British portion of the audience, although some of the Maltese in the boxes could be exasperating.

I once saw an amusing thing in this theatre. It was during the most dramatic part of *Tosca*. It will be remembered that Tosca has stabbed the villain, who falls dead, and she has to place two lighted candles at his head. On making her appearance from a door at the back of the stage, before the stabbing took place, she tripped over a mat and nearly fell on her face. Later, when she went to get the candles, she again tripped over the mat. This time I was forced to giggle, but worse was to follow. Tosca could not get those candles to light, and they behaved as if possessed of a devil. The audience became restive, but at last she managed it and, picking up the candlesticks, she carried them across and put them down at the dead man's head. Promptly one fell out of the stick and went out. Tosca then gave it up in disgust, whilst everyone tittered.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIGHTS

I

ONE of the first things I do when arriving in a new station is to try to get to know as much about the place and people as I can. In Malta I set out and wandered about just as a dog will do when introduced to a new home.

I was fortunate in my seeking, for I met the son of the late Sir T. Zammit, a pleasant young man of much intelligence and knowledge of his home, who, when he realized that I was deeply interested, and keen to see all that he could show, took me to many places.

In what follows I have tried hard to avoid the guide-book type of description, but, as is to be expected, these sketches of Malta's vast store of interest must be somewhat disconnected, for I visited them at many different times, and in various ways. First and foremost must be Valletta, that sun-drenched city of great charm.

Valletta is unique in more ways than one. It

was built by the Knights of Malta as a home and a fortress. It is now a strange blending of the very old and the most modern, and it contains more concentrated sights than any other city of its size in Europe.

Visitors, unfortunately, nearly always see it in the morning, or middle of the day, when the beauty and the charm are heavily veiled by hustling business activity. It should, like many another city which is old and yet young, be seen late at night, preferably a moonlit one. It is then that the old houses, whose fronts are ravished by modern shops being let into them, live again, and the past stalks proudly before those who have the eyes to see it. It is so easy to repopulate this city of fighting monks, for it is still their city, in spite of cinemas, electric light, radio, and motor-cars. Every street, house, and building of any size reeks of their presence, and, except in one or two of the main streets, the city has not outwardly changed since the time of the Knights.

Let us go for a stroll in it on this night of a nearly full moon. It is after 2 a.m., and Valletta sleeps deeply, so deeply that it hardly breathes. We will start from the Palace Square, which is still its heart.

The Square is deserted, silent, and flooded in brilliant moonlight. Romance perfumes the warm

atmosphere. Outside the main guard a sentry is standing, his rifle beside him, but he is so still that he does not appear alive. Opposite to him is the massive façade of the Grand Master's Palace, which looks down austere on to this area so drenched in the history of the Knights. What scenes have been enacted here, and with all the pageantry of the dead, almost forgotten, days! There have been fights, revels, indignation meetings, and joyful celebrations held on this Square; from the balcony of the palace many a Grand Master has spoken to the crowd and proclamations have been read, and it was here that a poor old Grand Master was so shamefully insulted by his knights and the mob.

Turning, we walk up Strada Reale, the main street, and as we do so a *carozza* (a horse-cab) comes out of a side-street. The driver looks towards us hopefully, thinking that we are some late revellers on our way home to bed. Beside him on his seat is a small boy who is sleeping peacefully. No *carozza* driver who plies for hire by night would dream of being without a companion beside him. Failure to do this is to invite His Satanic Majesty to occupy the vacant seat, and together they would drive to perdition—a horrible thought.

The shops are closed, and the ugly yellow building which is the Union Club has closed its

doors as we pass it and mount towards the Porte Reale, which is the main gate of the city. Through its low, arched gates we see, in miniature, the lovely floodlit vista of Floriana and the distant countryside.

Turning up beside the great pile of the Opera House, we come to an open space which is bounded on one side by the most modern and ornate of all the auberges, and which is known as the Castile. The heavy doors are closed, and no longer do the great ones of the Army and Navy walk up and down the flight of low, fan-shaped steps. Instead, others have taken their place. Shades of those proud, fierce, and hot-blooded Knights of Castile stalk up and down, in dress not at all monkish, and with bearing far from humble. Here comes a group of them, who appear to talk excitedly together as they come down the steps. Where are they going? Perhaps to the Palace to bait some poor, weak old Grand Master, as they did of old.

We step hurriedly aside to let them pass and they vanish into the deep shadows of a near-by street. We then move on to the Upper Baracca Gardens, which, on such a night as this, is a particularly lovely spot. Gone, for the moment, are the nursemaids, spitting peasants, and gaping tourists. The moonlight cascades through the oleanders, palm trees, and flower-shrubs, to dapple the paths and mangle the flowers. It is still and

peaceful, and, looking towards the many graceful arches of the once famous walk, the scene resembles an elaborate piece of stage scenery. The roof of the walk has long since vanished, removed by the order of a Grand Master, for it was here that naughty, rebellious, and passionate Knights used to gather and plot, hatching most vile schemes. Without a roof it was then possible to see, from a near-by point of vantage, who frequented this place of suspicion. The lack of cover also discouraged would-be plotters, for there was now no shade in summer and no shelter in winter.

The outer edges of these arches are close to the lip of the great bastions and ramparts which line the Grand Harbour. We cross over and lean on the railing, and are spell-bound by the beauty and splendour of the scene spread out below. The whole stretch of the most romantic harbour in the world lies before us, an etching by Nature in her most inspired mood.

Far below, on the stippled water, sit the great sable battleships and lean cruisers, all of which are lit by a hundred eyes. Directly opposite to where we stand, squatting like some gigantic toad, is the famous Fort of St. Angelo, a symphony in black-and-white, whose vast ramparts rise, tier by tier, from the water, to close in upon the tiny church of St. Anne which crowns the top. Behind the fort,

and on the far side of the creek facing us, are the rubrican masses of houses which make up the three towns, and which are said to be one of the most densely populated areas in Europe.

Wherever we look there is something of beauty to be appreciated. Distant Fort Ricasoli, which guards the harbour's entrance ; the winking lights on the slender arms of the breakwater ; the ramparts which fall for hundreds of feet to the water-front ; and the confused mass of houses clustering about the fish-market, all are studies in unusual contrasts, and above is the cold, glimmering sky.

Wending our footsteps backwards on the way we have come, we again meet Strada Reale and, it being still early, we decide to go down one of the narrow roads which lead steeply downwards towards the smaller harbour of Marsamuscetto. We move along the left-hand side of the street and peer down each side-turning, trying to make up our minds which we will choose, for they all appear intriguing.

At last we decide, and turn down an uneven roadway, where the tall, balconied houses face each other across the narrow space. One side is drenched in brilliant moonlight and the other veiled and indistinct. The road is deserted, and not a sound reaches our ears, whilst the atmosphere of the past is so strong as to make us shiver. But

what is that shadow gliding across our path? We peer fearfully ahead and smile, for it is only a local cat out on some late escapade ; he takes no notice of us, being far too intent upon some urgent business.

Again we shiver as we move further down this street of ghosts. Who are those stalking so silently beside us, in armour, velvet, and rags? Just impressions of the past, say our prosaic minds, but something deep down in us vibrates like the strings of a plucked harp.

A distant clock strikes an hour as we approach the lowest portion of the street. We halt abruptly and catch our breath in sudden alarm. From a very narrow turning just ahead, a tall, slim young man, dressed in a gay medieval costume, steps out and stands before us. His face is pale and sad, and his dark eyes burn fiercely. His features beneath the flat, velvet, beplumed hat are lit up by a sudden smile. He indicates that we should follow him, as he half turns away from us. Unable to prevent ourselves, we do so. A few paces further on the man halts before a single but massive door, whose knockers are aged bronzed dolphins. As we reach it, the door swings wide and the youth steps inside, and we follow him.

Three shallow steps lead into a small but lofty hall which is partly flooded by moonlight which

streams in from a window high up in the wall above the door-way. Facing us is a broad, winding, stone staircase, whose top is lost in deep shadow. Reluctantly we follow our guide up the steps, which he mounts with an easy grace as if he knew them well. At the second bend we stumble, and, in recovering, something drops on to the stone step, but we are too enthralled to stop and see what it is.

The air in this house is cold and unfriendly, and it appears to be devoid of furnishing. On reaching the top of the steps we realize that the young man has vanished—at least we cannot see him in the deep shadows. With rapidly beating hearts we stand undecided what to do. Then, greatly daring, we step forward and open a door near at hand. We fling it wide, and the sound of the turning lock echoes horrifyingly in the blackness of what must be an empty room of great size. Filled with a sudden and uncontrollable panic, we tear down the steps, dash through the still open door, and so on to the roadway. Casting a glance backwards, we see that the great door has swung to and closed behind us.

This incident actually happened to an acquaintance of mine, and it had a queer sequel. He hurried home and went to bed. The next morning he remembered the affair, and, smiling, said to himself that he must have dreamed it. He went off to his

work and completely forgot all about it in a pressure of business. Later in the morning he found that his favourite pipe was missing. A thorough search failed to produce it, and he thought back to when he had last used it. He had had it in his hands at the time of his adventure.

He sought out the street and found the house, but was unable to gain admittance, for it was empty and locked. After considerable difficulty he obtained the keys and, accompanied by the landlord, they went inside. There, lying on the stone stairs, was his pipe. The landlord, he told me, was not impressed by his story, and eyed him with deep suspicion.

Continuing our walk we turn left, and then right, and enter a very narrow street which is lined on either side by small shops. The air is close, stuffy, and tainted with odours of goat-foulings, decayed vegetables, and other indistinguishable smells, and they eddy about our nostrils. Towards the far end, and on the right-hand side, is a low, rounded archway, from which lead down a flight of steps, and they turn abruptly to the right.

This entrance leads to what was to have been a great dockyard in the time of the Knights, but which was never finished. It is now a densely populated area, lying well below the city, and in a great hollow. The scum of Malta are said to live

here, and even during the daytime it used not to be safe for strangers to wander about its ribbon-like alleys.

We will, however, just run down the steps and take a peep. The sight which meets our gaze as we turn the corner is worth the effort. A wave of fetid air hits our faces, but the moonlight has flooded this strange mass of tiny houses and narrow alleys, just wide enough for two persons to pass, and has transformed it into something the like of which we have never seen before. A hundred thousand shadows fight for dominance with the brilliant patches of light in a nightmare of jagged pattern. The flat, uneven roofs rise and fall without rhyme or reason. Tiny, closely shut windows are pools of blackness. Forgotten laundry hangs limp and forlorn from poles and windows. A dog, scenting our presence, dashes out of an alley and growls fiercely, and a child wails pitifully from a room somewhere above our heads. What misery, poverty, and hopelessness there is concentrated in this strange place, cut off from the outside world. How Dante would have liked to stand by our side, for this is a living hell, if there is such a thing.

Once again on the street we move onwards, turn right, and come out upon one of the lower ramparts which face Marsamuscetto Harbour and

Sliema Creek. Cool breezes fan our cheeks, and the water below is placid as it stretches into the distance. The far lights of the destroyers lying at anchor in the creek, and those from the artillery barracks at Tigne, vie with the stars in their lovely reflections. To our left is the conical mass which is Mannoel Island, and directly below us where the ferries ply between Valletta and Sliema.

Leaning on the wall, our attention is attracted to a commotion on the quay below. A belated reveller has appeared and is hailing one of the waiting *dhaisas*. A water-policeman comes out of the station and stands watching, as he yawns and stretches himself. The *dhaisaman*, galvanized into action, brings his shapely craft to the steps and guides the uncertain feet of his fare into the boat. Picking up a pair of heavy oars, the boatman thrusts them into the water with strong, sure strokes, and the *dhaisa* glides off into the distance, for all the world like a gondola. The policeman returns to his room. We will follow his example and go home to bed.

II

We have seen something of Valletta by night ; what of it by day ? That is a very different matter, where there is plenty of interest, but little or no

beauty. There is often an unpleasant glare, and in the mid-morning it can be hot and airless, and dusty, when the two main streets are filled with noisy traffic and crowds which exasperate by the slowness with which they move along the pavements.

It is noon, and the narrow pavements and roadway of Strada Reale are crowded with a very varied type of people. Mainly they are Maltese business men of all degrees, who use the pavements and road as a club. They saunter and gather in groups, where they talk, or have excited arguments, and obstruct those who wish to use the street for its legitimate purpose. Also, strolling, are the middle-class Maltese girls and women, who, although inclined to plumpness, are often quite good-looking and smartly dressed in a continental fashion. There are peasants, school-boys, workmen, messengers, and workers of all kinds passing up and down, and interspersed with them are English women, bent on shopping, off to change their books at the Garrison library, or perhaps about to turn into the Snake Pit, that home of scandal which is the women's side of the Union Club. There are always a few officers and men of the three Services to be seen in the street, to say nothing of the ubiquitous and invariably plump priest.

The shops are small, and most disappointing

from a visitor's point of view, for the Maltese make no effort to cater for the floods of tourists which now and again invade the city. To enter any but the principal shops is useless, because what is required is never stocked, and the small shopkeeper is a stupid, unobliging person, without manners or the desire to sell you his goods. The only shops which have any real interest for the casual visitor are kept by Indians. It is an astonishing fact that there is only one shop in the city which really stocks articles of local manufacture and interest, and that is tucked away down by the Customs House, and is, I believe, run by a Briton.

The Maltese make it almost impossible for a Briton to run a business, or to keep a shop, on his own. They boycott the place, and put every obstacle they can in the trader's path. There are, however, one or two English firms of long standing which cater solely for the Briton.

A wise sightseer will turn off the main streets into one of the many side-turnings. In them he will find much to amuse him. The tiny shops, the goats, small picturesque urchins, donkeys, flat carts, ornate churches, long flights of shallow steps, distant vistas of the harbours, and the ever-present faldetta.

The faldetta is now worn only by women of the lower classes, and is a quaint hood and cape

which falls to below the waist, and is made of black silk. It entirely hides the head and shoulders of the wearer from behind. Its origin is obscure ; some say that it was first introduced during the French occupation of the islands to prevent the lewd and licentious soldiery from peering down into the faces of the women ; others that during the time the French stayed not a virgin was left upon the islands, and the women adopted this form of head-gear as a sign of mourning for their lost chastity. Whatever the reason for its inception, the faldetta is quaint, and it is a pity that the wearing of it is slowly dying out.

In a side-turning off Strada Meccanti, and facing St. John's Cathedral, there is a large hook let into the wall of a house. Its use had something to do with the cathedral, so it is said. But legend has it that any naval cadet or sub-lieutenant who can squeeze his slim body through it is bound to rise to high rank. Nelson is said to have done it.

St. John's co-cathedral cannot be called impressive from the exterior, but there is a good reason for this. When it was designed the Knights of Malta cleverly managed to combine something that was half-fortress and half-church, and this can at once be seen when it is pointed out. The interior does not impress me, but a photograph in this book will give a good idea of the decoration,

which is wonderful to those who like that kind of thing.

All that is left of the old, world-famous Fort St. Elmo is the tiny chapel where the despairing Knights prayed before its final fall to the Turks. The Royal Malta Artillery now occupy it in its modern form, and the sentry on the gates will let you pass, if you ask nicely to be allowed to look at the chapel.

Descriptions of the auberges, the palace, and other sights I have given elsewhere in this book. But every newcomer to Valletta, at some time or other, uses the Baracca Lift. This scales one side of a gigantic moat, which must be far and away the largest ever dug, and was cut by the Knights when the city was being built, and the stone used to dress the walls of the bastions. The bed of this moat, where it opens out towards the harbour, and close to the base of the lift, was used as a dockyard, and the niches, which once held the supporting beams, can still be seen. Where once warships lay, now stand motor-cars and horse-cabs.

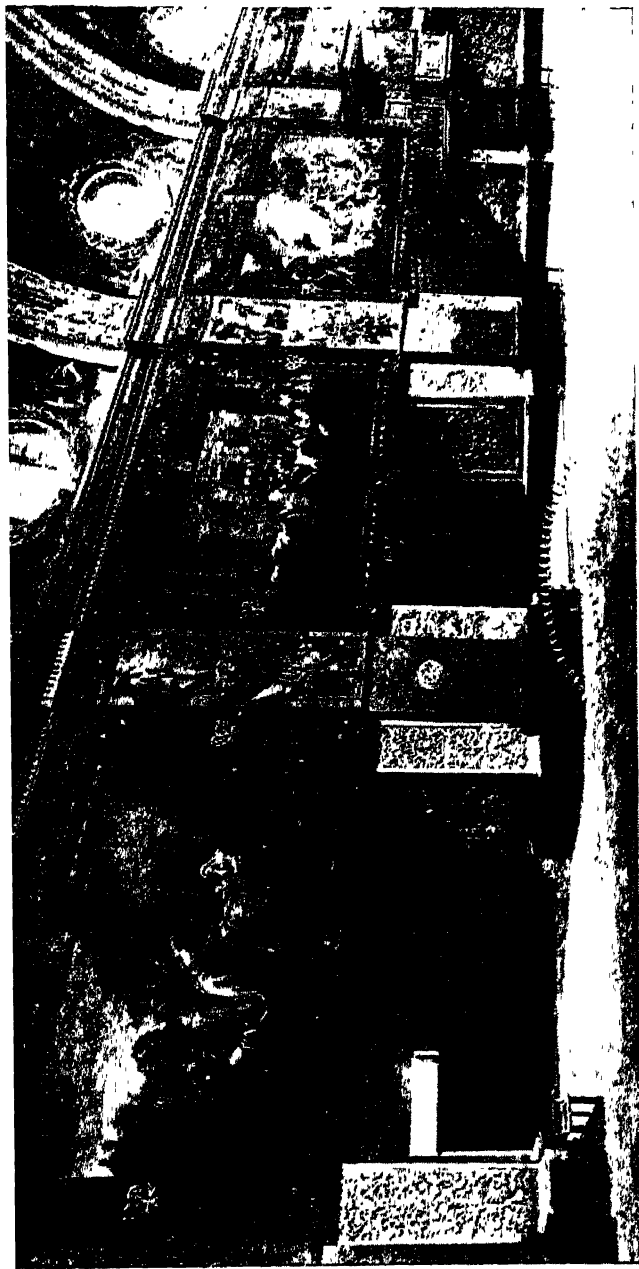
III

Here is yet another side to Valletta. Running parallel on the north side of Strada Reale is Strada Stretta, which, among the troops and the lower

deck, is known as The Gut. Its counterpart can be found in most parts of the world where the Services congregate. Bombay, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the rest, all know these places. But they, and it, are not such sinks of iniquity, nor are they haunts of the devil, vice, and depravity, as the snobs and moralists would have us to believe.

When the British soldier or sailor feels the need for relaxation, or, as he puts it, "a spot of fun", he goes where he can find music, bright lights, food, beer, feminine society, and cheerfulness. In Strada Stretta there are all of these. It is, however, a damnable and very shameful libel on that delightful child the Service man to say that he goes to this place for purely immoral reasons. The smug busy-bodies who expand on these things would be horrified if I said that they went to the Sliema Club on Saturday nights for exactly the same reasons as a soldier goes to Strada Stretta. What is so extraordinary is that those who govern us are talked into believing that such places are not only bad, but unnecessary.

Those who are used to more refined and expensive forms of exactly the same kind of amusement are, when they visit Strada Stretta, inclined to sniff and call the place garish and vulgar, entirely forgetting that the Service man has only a few shillings to spend on his amusements ; but I will



These are the unique and magnificent tapestries in St. John's Co-Cathedral. They are only shown on very special occasions.



The famous cart tracks over which there has been so much argument.

wager this place offers more value for money than many another select spot in Valletta.

From nine o'clock in the evening onwards, the narrow, steeply sloping street is crowded with soldiers, sailors, and marines, who are out to have as amusing a time as their means permit, which will include a large and satisfying meal, a dance or two, and beer drunk in company with cheerful companions. Some of the men, do, of course, go to the brothels, but the numbers are comparatively few. The small cafés, restaurants, and dance-halls are in full swing, where there is brilliant illumination, dancing, and music. Let us go into one of these places and see really what goes on.

At the lowest end of the street is the "Morning Star". A few steps lead up from the street, directly into a large room which is mainly a dance-hall. It is brilliantly lighted, and the walls are hung with long mirrors and painted with fat cupids and very pink roses. Tables and chairs line the walls, and at the far end a small band is playing the latest dance tunes. The floor is crowded with men in uniform, who are dancing with women of all types : dark, tall, short, and plump, pretty and fair, and all of them come from the Central European countries. At the tables there are groups of men drinking bottles of the local and excellent light beer, which is bought for fourpence.

I walk across the floor towards a vacant seat, and as I do so every girl has a good look at me as she sizes up my potentialities for earning her a few coppers. From each drink I give them, or allow them to order for me, they draw a tiny percentage in the form of metal discs, which are changed afterwards into cash. A small, dark, pretty little female, dressed in yellow satin, who is dancing with an over-heated, red-faced marine, who is thoroughly enjoying himself, smiles at me as she passes the table at which I have seated myself. She winks, and I know that, in due course, she will come across and ask me to dance, or to give her a drink, which is merely coloured water, but for which I pay threepence.

At the next table, nearly touching my own, are two sailors, who lean with their elbows on the cloth and watch the dancers. Before them are two bottles and two glasses half-filled with beer. One is a tall, fair, and huge young man, with a slightly flushed face ; his companion is smaller and dark, and he grins amiably at me.

“Have a drink, mate?” he inquires, leaning towards me.

Not having had time to give an order myself, I accept his offer, as I am almost forced to do. The fair man now turns fully round and looks at me with a pair of bright blue eyes in which there is a gleam

of doubt, for he cannot place me, and is suspicious.

"Just got back?" I ask him, smiling.

"Yes," he replies. "We got in yesterday."

"From Alex, I suppose?"

"Yes. That's right," replies the dark man.

"And damned glad to be back."

"Found it pretty warm, didn't you?" I suggest.

"Warm!" they both say with deep feeling.

"Why, this place is a blooming ice-house to it. Ain't it, Darkie?" continues the fair man.

The smaller man agrees forcibly that it is, as he politely pushes across my bottle of beer and glass which have arrived. We all three lift our glasses and I make suitable gestures of thanks.

The fair sailor, having decided to accept me, tells of some of their experiences in Alexandria, which mainly turn upon the price they had to pay for the drink and food in the cafés. From this we drift into Service matters, until the time arrives for me to offer beer. I do so, and it is politely accepted.

By this time the hall has gradually filled up, and several of my companions' pals appear on the scene, to be greeted with expressive Service pet-names. I am now pressed on all sides to drink beer, but am able to refuse, as I point to a nearly full glass. Into the throng which has gathered about us the small dark girl pushes her way and

asks me to dance with her. I shake my head and offer her a drink. This she smilingly refuses, and departs to find some less engaged guest of the house.

One of the newcomers, a marine, with a naughty twinkle in his eye, asks me if I know Hong Kong. The fact that I do is acclaimed by several others, and we dive into a telling of our experiences in that pleasant colony. Many shrewd comments are passed, and I realize that I am talking to men who are by no means fools, and who know many sides of life.

The beer flows, some of the men get up and dance, and others drift away to other tables, but we are all jolly good fellows together, and I realize that I have been in the company of these men for close upon an hour and a half, and not once have I heard an unkind remark passed about another person. It is now time for me to leave, but this is not easy to do, for my companions are not so ready to let me go. I am forced to lie, and regretfully depart, knowing that the next time we meet we cannot know each other, for I shall probably be in uniform, and they surprised to see me so clad.

Before leaving this area, let us go, for a few moments, into one of the select houses of amusement at the top end of the street, which is frequented by officers. On a corner we see the words "Red

Mill" and, turning into a door-way, we mount a flight of stairs to enter a small, narrow room which opens out into a larger one. Here the atmosphere is neither so bright nor so cheerful as the place we have just left, but the same tables line the walls, and the same kind of beer is being drunk, but by men not in Service uniform.

The women here are dressed in exaggerated forms of evening dress, and some of them are quite pretty ; but, on the whole, they are far more calculating than their sisters farther down the street. They have more to gain, but have more difficulty in obtaining it than from the open-handed, generous soldier or sailor. The young subaltern and his like only become free with their money when they are well primed with liquor, and the girls have to bring about this state of affairs themselves, by tactfully getting their chosen partners to spend money on them without their realizing what is taking place ; the effort involved is no easy one.

We stand by the door and watch a cabaret turn which is taking place. It is a poor affair, where one of the girls has put on a special costume, and is prancing about the floor, performing what she fondly thinks are graceful postures. No one takes much notice of her. The band, a set of white-faced men, weary and bored, have to continue grinding out tunes until 2 a.m., and they do this six days a

week. One of them smiles faintly and says something to a companion. They look towards where a large party of men are sitting at a table, surrounded by partly empty glasses. They have been drinking, and are boisterous and noisy and the girls beside them laugh obediently.

There is nothing gay or cheerful in this place. It is just sordid, and those who come to it do so for entirely different reasons from those farther down the street. The air is hot, misty with cigarette-smoke, and in it there is the vague smell of heated bodies, scent, and stale beer. It is time to go to bed, and to leave those who like this sort of thing to carry on.

Instead of hiring a car back to Sliema, we will go down and take a *dhaisa* across the harbour, and clean our lungs of smoke and bad air.

IV

Malta is strewn with prehistoric remains, and the most interesting of them all is most certainly the Hypogeum. This is an underground temple, cut out by a Stone Age people from solid rock, and it consists of a series of chambers, passages, and store-rooms, all of which were excavated *without* the use of cutting-tools, and it is, of its kind, the most wonderful thing in the world. Only

a visit to this place can give any idea of the labour involved in its making.

I have taken people to see the Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum, to give it its full name, who generally yawn at the mention of the word archaeology, and they have come away visibly and audibly impressed—impressed against their wills.

The existence of this temple, in the middle of the small town of Paula, not far from Valletta, was not suspected, and modern buildings were erected on the site. In one of the houses someone decided that he needed a well, so he actually dug down into the floors of one of the rooms and promptly went through into what seemed to be a cavern. The late Sir Themistocles Zammit was then asked to look at it, and as a result the place was opened up.

In the old entrance passage, layers, several feet in depth, were found, and they consisted almost entirely of human remains, and it became obvious that when the temple, as such, was given up, it was used as a burial-place by succeeding generations.

The modern entrance is a circular staircase which drives downwards for many feet to open out into a main hall, if it can be so described. It is lighted by electricity, and on the roof and walls of this chamber can be seen the remains of decorations carried out in red pigment, which suggest a primitive form of the tree of life. Here also can best

be seen how the cutting-out was done. The men of those days had no tools for cutting stone, but, armed with implements which must have resembled a blunt chisel, and a hammer, they set to work. A projection of rock would be selected, and the base knocked away until it was possible for the projection itself to be broken off. This left other projections which were dealt with in a similar manner, and so the infinitely laborious work went forward.

The largest chamber in the temple opens out of the main hall, and it is of particular interest. About twelve feet in height, the truly amazing thing about this spot is that it was designed on almost modern acoustic lines, the roof having been cut out in a manner which leaves no doubt about this, as it is possible to prove. Half-way up the left-hand wall is a small concave hole. If a man places his mouth close to this hole and speaks in a bass voice into it, the chamber becomes filled with deep booming echoes of the voice, which are awe-inspiring, and must have filled the ancients with terror. A priest thundering his warnings here must have sounded a god indeed. The sound travels to the farthest limits of the temple, even down into the chambers far below, and it is easy to picture the shivering worshippers, huddled together in the entrance chamber, screened by a curtain from the voice of the oracle,

The holy of holies lies to the left of the oracle chamber, and was approached by way of two ante-chambers. The first chamber was, perhaps, for the middle and higher classes of devotees, and here can be seen the type of people who once came to worship. The walls are clearly worn away by the rubbing of heads and shoulders, and thus show that they were a short, stocky race.

The inner sanctuary, heavily screened, consists of a tiny chamber, which has a niche for the god and a table for the sacrifices. There is no evidence whatsoever that the sacrifices were other than animal ones.

To the left of the two ante-rooms a passage leads to the lower rooms and store-houses, some of which may, or may not, have been used as dungeons, but some most certainly as treasure stores. This passage has many traps for the unwary, and it shows much ingenuity. Without warning the floor drops seven or more feet in certain places, but these drops can be avoided by using the cunningly hidden steps which lie round the corner where the drop takes place. It is, therefore, quite clear that no one who was not acquainted with the secrets of the way could use it without coming upon disaster.

Even when brightly lit with electric light, the tiny rooms and holes leading off this passage are cold, eerie, and strange, and when peering down

into them you wonder how even the priests found their way about. Those who know say that artificial lights were not known in those days—certainly the walls and roofs do not show any signs of smoke, which must happen if torches or crude oil lamps were used. But then, this is only one of the mysteries of this fascinating place.

Besides what I have described, there are numerous other things of interest, such as the well still containing water, the supposed snake-pit, and the hole filled with a pyramidal pile of human bones, said to be those of over seven thousand human beings.

Having been to this place several times, I am convinced that other chambers, yet to be found, exist. Nothing can be done, however, for lack of money, which leads me to observe how astonishing a thing it is that Malta has been so neglected by archaeologists. They go off to dig in dusty mounds in Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt, when far more interesting relics lie near at hand. The prehistoric remains of Malta have been hardly touched, and yet you have only to visit the local museum to see what has been found.

v

On the outskirts of the same town of Paula is Taxien, another Stone Age monument of great

interest. This was a temple, or rather a series of temples, built about five thousand years ago, and having laid buried since Roman times they are unusually well preserved. They were dug out during a few years just before the end of the last century.

Taxien, like several other temples on the island, consists of semi-circular chambers, each connected with one or more of its neighbours. The roofs have gone, but the walls still remain, and many of the huge blocks of stone show astonishingly artistic designs carved on them in bas-relief, the execution of which would not shame stone-carvers of today. There is also a realistic carving of a sow and her litter, as well as one of a bull.

Animal sacrifices took place in the various shrines, which show signs of great heat from fires built up on the beaten earth floors ; there are also curious holes in the altars, for securing the animals, and their bones have been found piled up in spaces behind the altars themselves.

This place and the others, which lie some distance away at Hagiar Kim, are, I consider, far and away more interesting than Stonehenge ; although the stones are not, generally, as large, a few, however, do compare very favourably in size with it, and most certainly in the cleanness of their dressing.

I am not particularly thrilled by such places after the first visit, but I realize what a joy Taxien

must be to those who are keen on archaeology. In the Valletta museum there is the finest collection of Stone Age remains in the world, which has been brought from these temples. One of the goddesses, of which there are several examples, is a revolting fat female, with legs like balloons and arms to match. It is strange to consider how all primitive folk, even today, like their womenfolk to be fat and glossy ; and apparently these Stone Age people were no exception to this rule.

VI

Near the middle of the island, perched on the northern end of a high ridge which has precipitous sides, is the ancient Maltese capital of Citta Vecchia. It is said to have been built by the Greeks in 700 B.C., and the site chosen, as is so often the case on islands, was as far away from the coast as it could be placed, thereby making it difficult for raiders to reach it.

The city is not large, but within its walls and massive, hoary ramparts are a maze of narrow streets, in which there are vast and splendid houses, some of which have been handed down in the great Maltese families for close upon a thousand years. I can truthfully say that it is far and away the cleanest city I have ever been in.

The quiet dignity of those streets resembles that usually found in a cathedral close ; and an air of hoary antiquity and exciting romance hangs over the place. Only the privileged know what lies behind those vast, studded doors, with huge bronze door-knockers. There are some remarkably fine Norman houses here, with their beautiful tooth-edged and slender-columned windows. One house is a particularly fine specimen, and its artistic owner has filled it with a priceless collection of suitable antiques. Often when passing this house my fingers have itched to thief the wondrous door-knockers.

Wandering through the narrow streets, stippled with blazing patches of sunshine and grotesque purple shadows, where nothing moves, and only an occasional human being is met, you come at last to the part of the city which is farthest from the gate. Here is a small open space, which is bounded by the bastions on one side. An astonishing view can be had from here, where a large portion of the island is spread out like a map below you.

Turning back, you can wander through yet more streets, to come at last to the sun-drenched Square where stands the magnificent cathedral, which is so much more beautiful than the co-cathedral in Valletta. The original building was erected over the site of Publius' house, who, it will

be remembered, was the Roman governor in St. Paul's time, and was the first bishop. Only the chancel remains of the old building, the remainder having been destroyed in an earthquake.

The interior is indeed splendid, and has nothing of the cold bareness of our cathedrals. Here are rich and sombre decorations, fine paintings and lovely marbles, and an air of sumptuous but quiet restfulness. It was here that the militant old bishop snatched up his naughty canons and had them tied to horses' tails. This is the story :

The Bishop of Malta, Bishop Gargallo, who lived in the old city of Notabile, was a fierce and imperious gentleman. When he was ordered by the Pope to pay a large sum each year from his revenue into the treasury of the Inquisitor he blew up. With quite unbishop-like language he refused to do as he was ordered. The Pope promptly smacked this child of the Church by deposing him and putting a dean in his office as Bishop of Malta.

When the news reached Bishop Gargallo he rose up and went in search of that dean. He failed to find him, but what he did discover was a representative of the Inquisitor (the Pope's ambassador) standing on the steps of the altar in the cathedral, about to read the Pope's order for his (the Bishop's) deposition. Gargallo set upon that person, and had him beaten and driven from the building.

The Knights in Valletta were vastly tickled by these goings-on, but also somewhat scandalized, although they hated the Inquisitor as much as the Bishop did.

Bishop Gargallo now defied the Inquisition, but, to his fury, he found that his canons and staff were more afraid of Rome than they were of his fierceness. They supported the man who had been put in the Bishop's place by the Inquisitor. The Order itself wisely took no part in what followed, but stood by as an interested and amused spectator.

The Bishop collected a party of armed men one Sunday morning and entered the cathedral in Notabile. Here High Mass was in progress. Having cut off all means of escape, he snatched up all his disloyal canons in their gorgeous robes, tied them to the tails of horses, and dragged them off to deep, damp dungeons. Here they lingered in durance vile ; several died, whilst Gargallo took unto himself all their property and gave their positions to friends of his own. He thereupon, in wrath and gloom, left Malta before the outraged Pope could lay hands on him. A grand old militant cockerel, he died in peace at a ripe old age, but to the very end his imperious will never bent.

When stepping lightly in the side-chapels, or avoiding the great pillars, you suddenly come upon

solitary working women in their faldettas, or a peasant man in his shirt-sleeves. The lines in their faces have softened as they sit, or kneel, and drink in the soothing peace. Gone for the moment are their cares, and they are drawing comfort from what means so much to them. It is at such times you are made to realize all that the Church of Rome is to its children.

If you are polite and interested, a custodian will take you up many flights of stairs to a small museum, where there are many things of absorbing interest. One is the silver cross which was carried by Godfrey de Bouillon when he entered Jerusalem after its first capture ; another is a truly astonishing number of infinitely small relics of the saints. There must be hundreds and hundreds of them ; tiny fragments of bone, set in gold and sealed by the Papal seal to show that they are authentic. I do not wish to appear flippant, but it does seem a little hard on the saints. What will they do on the day of judgment, with their remains scattered in a hundred different places ? What a scramble will take place, and how awkward it would be if you took the wrong piece !

A visit to Citta Vecchia on a moonlit night is an experience of such beauty as to make it seem unreal and quite fantastic. The chequered alleyways, where the moonlight makes pools of silver

on the walls of the houses, and lustral paths for your feet, are ways in a city of sublime sleep. Time has passed away, and the city belongs to the ages. Normans, proud Castillians, and Knights of St. John walk abroad in this city, which was never really theirs. It is the heart of Malta, and the Maltese are justly proud of their city.

VII

Further along the ridge are the Catacombs, where Paul is said to have stayed. Such places give me the shivers.

These are extensive, and a flight of steps leads down to an underground chamber, one side of which was once a chapel and the other the funereal dining-room. This later place consists mainly of a very large circular stone, sloping upwards towards its centre, which has been cut out of the rock of the floor. Around this the ancient feasters seated themselves when the dead had been put away. It is damp and chilly and horribly depressing down here, and when looking at this gruesome table you wonder what was in those diners' minds as they bolted the food before them. Were they secretly glad that they had laid to rest a heavy-fisted father or a bitter-tongued wife? Or were they sorry to have lost a loved one?

Leading away from this spot are a maze of low, narrow tunnels, whose walls have been cut into to make sarcophagi out of the living stone. Some of these tombs are double and even treble, and all have been ravished at one time or another. The progress down these tunnels, with the gaping tombs on either side, is unutterably depressing. Who were these people who took such pains to see that their bones should be intact when the time came to rise again? How did they live; what did they think about; and what were they like to look at? We know nothing, except that their hopes were vain ones, for their bones lie scattered, probably a part of the dust over which we are walking, ravishers of tombs having few scruples, especially when they do not find what they are looking for.

At one end we come to the children's portion, where the tiny tombs are, in some cases, only a few inches long. No. Let us go. It is time to be up in the cheerful sunlight again. Death is too close to all of us to need our being reminded of it so forcibly.

VIII

We will spend a while in the open air, and visit the very famous Cart Tracks, which are not far

away. Getting into our motor-car we return and pass the old city, to dash down a steep hill, rush up the other side, and stop half-way to the top. Leaving the road, we walk across an expanse of bare grey rock to where, running up the hill, are the tracks cut deeply into the hard stone.

They consist of parallel grooves, biting into the rock to a depth of two feet and more in certain places. About six and a half feet apart, there are regular junctions, just as there are in tram-lines, but the extraordinary thing about these tracks is the fact that there are no signs of wear whatsoever in the space between them.

Over this state of affairs bitter and raging controversy has taken place. Sir T. Zammit, the late great authority on such things, was inclined to think that these tracks were deliberately cut to allow the passage of vehicles over the rough rocks. Others that they must have been made by wheeled or sledged traffic. But, whatever made them, how were they dragged or pushed? Animals or men would surely have worn some kind of track with their feet. Some authorities cleverly get over this by saying that the tracks were used to carry the soil from the valleys to the hill-tops, and that the earth falling off the carts made a soft cushion on the rock for the feet of the haulers. This does not ring quite true to me, for if the earth fell off on to

the track, it would also do so on the path of the wheels or sledge. I might suggest that reeds and rushes were laid to spare the feet of human haulers, but that again does not sound right, for servants were not considered in those days.

Whatever made them, and for what purpose, these tracks are found in isolated spots all over the island, and they do not appear to lead to, or end at, any particular destination. They do not even run as if they were used when there was the bridge between Europe and Africa. Airmen state that on clear, calm days the tracks can be seen under the sea, and below cliffs now four hundred feet high. If that is not a poser, I do not know what is, for if the cliffs had fallen into the sea they must have broken up and destroyed all evidence of the tracks.

If they do nothing else, these tracks certainly provide a great deal of interest and amusement to those who like arguing over such things.

IX

Besides the more spectacular sights in Malta, there are many minor ones of much interest.

Towards the southern end of the island, and on the outskirts of the village of Krendi, is a quite remarkable hole in the ground. A rough and

narrow path leads off the road and ends on the lip of what at first appears to be the crater of an extinct volcano. Almost circular, and hundreds of feet across, the sides fall sheer to an irregular bed two hundred and more feet deep, which is covered with trees and shrubs.

Zammit, who took me to this place, asked me what I thought it was, and for the life of me I could not guess, although the answer was simple enough. There had once been a vast cave here whose roof had fallen in during an earthquake or a tremor. But it must have been the father and mother of all caves of the single variety.

Beyond this spot a rough road leads very steeply down towards the cliffs, to a tiny fishing-village which lines the edge of a long and narrow creek. Drawn up on the slipway, and floating on the clear, deep blue water, are many gaily painted fishing-boats, which resemble highly-coloured drakes in their colours of vivid green, red, yellow, and blue.

It is from here that you take a boat when on a visit to the Blue Grotto. I did this once, but did not feel at all safe, for the boat was small and the sea at this point can rise up very quickly, with dire and awful results. The Grotto is a long sea-cave into which the boat is taken, and when looking

towards the entrance the bright light shining through the water turns it a heavenly blue ; but it is best seen in the early morning.

After visiting this cave, my companion and I threw off our clothes and went for a swim, and it was here that, when scrambling out of the water on to a rock, I nearly trod on a sea-egg. It was a large one, and the narrowness of my escape turned me quite pale with fright.

Still further along this coast, but this time on the top of the four-hundred-foot cliffs, is another cave. This has a romantic history, for in it once lived the bad, bold robber Hassan. He terrorized the whole district, but in spite of traps and organized searches his hiding-place could not be found. One day, however, a small girl saw the robber coming across the fields, and she hid in fear behind a wall. From there she saw him walk to the edge of the cliffs and disappear. Filled with astonishment, she pluckily followed and, peeping fearfully over the edge, saw a ledge of rock a few feet below the top of the cliff ; and so the robber's lair was found. He died slowly, lingeringly, and messily, to be flung at last into the sea, while the ravished district got back most of its goods.

A narrow path has now been cut just below the edge of the cliffs, so that it is possible to see the cave, but only those with steady heads should use

it, although the view of the waves breaking on the rocks so far below is magnificent.

Among the other minor sights is the island where St. Paul was wrecked, and the dome of Musta Church, which is on the way to the former place. The Roman Villa, to the north-west, is very interesting, for it has some fine floors and some quaint sanitary remains, which illustrate the fact that the Roman Houses of Meditation were not exactly comfortable ; in fact they are ridiculous according to our standards.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KNIGHTS

I

IN Malta it is quite impossible to avoid the Knights, for the place is so drenched in their history that it is faced wherever you go. Even the forts we manned with our great guns were built by them, and they are as strong as anything that can be built today.

My Maltese friends showed me many things of interest concerning the Order, a few of which I put down here, but before doing so I must give a brief outline of the history of these fighting monks, in case some readers do not know it.

The Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, more commonly known as the Knights of Malta, began life in Jerusalem just before the days of the First Crusade. Their founder was a certain Peter Gerard, who was rector of a tiny hospital opened to give aid to the numerous weary pilgrims who came to the Holy City. The Order, from merely tending the sick and needy, took on a military side, when they swore to defend their faith, live chaste

lives, and, in other words, to become fighting monks.

They fought with great valour through the Crusades and their fame spread all over Europe, where the wealthy and the pious gave them large properties from which they were able to draw revenues. They must not, however, be confused with the Knights Templar, who were an entirely different order.

Down the centuries the Order of St. John became very wealthy, but after the fall of Acre and the loss of the Holy Land they were forced to find a new home. Settling in Rhodes, that lovely island of roses, they built the famous fortifications and spent their time harrying the Turks, who were their deadly enemies. The Turks twice besieged the Order here, and on the second occasion made them depart.

After much wandering about in Southern Europe, Charles of Spain gave them the island of Malta, which was reluctantly accepted. Here the Knights lived until their final collapse, when Napoleon looted Valletta.

When they first arrived in Malta the Order lived on the far side of the Grand Harbour which faced the bare, rocky neck of land on which Valletta stands today. On the point of this strip of land, and guarding the entrance to both harbours, was

the small fort of St. Elmo. It was from St. Angelo and Fort St. Elmo that the Knights fought the invading Turks in the great siege of Malta, which ranks as one of the most famous in all history. It was after the departure of the Turk, with his tail well between his legs, that the building of Valletta was commenced.

The Fort of St. Elmo was one of the first places to which I was taken by my friend. The Royal Malta Artillery now occupy the place and serve the great modern guns which have been installed there. Nothing remains of the old fort except the tiny chapel, but, standing on the more modern ramparts, it is possible to visualize something of the grim fight that took place on this spot. This is the story of St. Elmo, and it took place nearly four hundred years ago, but it will live for ever in the minds of the Maltese.

In 1565, Soliman, the Sultan of the Turks, having prepared his great armada, sent it off under Mustapha Pasha, who was ordered to utterly destroy, once and for all, the Order which, for five hundred years, had been a thorn in the Turkish side.

The fleet appeared off Malta on May 18, 1565. According to the records, it did not contain nearly as many men as there had been at the second siege of Rhodes, but in experience and heavy siege trains it was greatly superior.

The Turkish army landed to the south-east, in St. Thomas's Bay, and quickly formed a great semi-circle on the high ground at the head of the two harbours. The Turkish commanders now had violent disagreement as to the plan of attack. This was brought about by the mysterious non-appearance of the famous Dragut, who was really the commander-in-chief. Piali, the Turkish admiral, feared an attack upon his vessels lying in the open bays to the south, and he insisted that Fort St. Elmo must be first attacked so that he could berth the fleet in the safe harbour of Marsamuscetto, and that the attack on the Borgo must wait until St. Elmo fell. He won his point.

On May 24 began what was to turn out to be the most gallant defence against overwhelming odds which is recorded in history. The tiny Fort of St. Elmo was to be exposed to the full force of the Turkish army, for just a month. Its defence was hopeless from the start, and the defenders knew it.

The vast and famous Turkish mortars and guns were soon brought up, and they began to pound the outer defences with huge balls of marble and iron. For days on end the bombardment continued, and slowly the outer defences of St. Elmo began to dissolve, like a cube of sugar when placed in a teaspoon of water.

Most historians, when writing upon this siege, and on the defence of St. Elmo in particular, give their readers the false impression that the Knights were supermen, who knew neither fear nor human weaknesses. The very glory of St. Elmo's defence, however, lies in the fact that its defenders were very human, and fear stalked rampant behind those crumbling walls.

After a week it seemed that the end could not be long delayed, and the Knights in the fort sent across to the Grand Master in St. Angelo asking to be allowed to leave the place. La Valette listened with displeasure, which he could not conceal, to this application for aid so early in the siege. He pointed out the importance of holding this fort, and how the Viceroy of Sicily had stated that if it was lost he would not hazard his master's (King of Spain's) fleet, which he promised was on its way to assist the Order. The Grand Master then made it plain that he had little use for those who squealed before they were hurt.

The knight who had gone across returned to St. Elmo, where his message was ungraciously received, for the defenders felt that they were being sacrificed to no real purpose. Just at this time the Turkish admiral, who appears to have been keeping an eye wide open to see that none of the Order's galleys got out of Galley Creek, was mortally

wounded in the head by a splinter of rock. During the confusion this caused, a galley was able to slip out and dash across to Sicily, where it carried a message imploring the Viceroy to hurry up with his assistance.

After many assaults had taken place and been repulsed, a sentry being asleep, the Turks managed to capture all the outer defences of St. Elmo, leaving the bare walls exposed to the full blast of future assaults and bombardments.

At the time when the Turks were becoming somewhat disheartened at their lack of success, Dragut himself appeared on the scene, and soon made his presence felt by posting extra batteries and inspiring the Turks to great energy.

As day after day passed, the defenders in the fort became more and more exhausted. Harassed by continual fire, worn out with strain and lack of sleep, and, finally, continual bouts of heavy fighting, they felt the limits of their endurance had been reached. In consequence a knight of proved courage, and who stood high in the Grand Master's estimation, was sent across to St. Angelo to beg that the defenders might be moved, for the situation was daily becoming worse and worse.

La Valette listened and refused to consider abandoning the fort, in spite of the fact that all the knights in St. Angelo were in favour of doing so.

He clung with desperate tenacity to the belief that the long expected relief from Sicily must appear soon, and that the Order must not risk a refusal for this fleet to enter the harbour. He promised, however, to send over as many reinforcements as he could, and stated that he himself would go across to the fort and take command. This the Knights refused to allow.

It must not be thought for a moment that the men in Fort St. Elmo were cowards, or had not fought as bravely as men can fight. They were merely human, believing that, by giving up their lives, they were serving no real or useful purpose.

The Grand Master, fighting for time, sent three knights from St. Angelo to make an inspection of the condition of the fort. These inspectors disagreed. Two of them were fully convinced that the defenders were right, and that the fort was untenable, but the third was of the opinion that, with further men and stores, it was possible to hold out for a few more days. It has been suggested that La Valette told him to say this. He stuck to his point, however, with the result that there was nearly a free fight in the fort itself, which was only prevented by the commander ringing the alarm-bell.

La Valette in St. Angelo now became worried, fearing that the garrison in St. Elmo would give up in spite of his orders. He made a fiery speech,

and called for volunteers to go across and take the place of those who he suspected were about to disobey his orders. At once there was a scramble among the Knights to be allowed to die for this forlorn hope.

It is from this point onwards that the real glory of the defence of St. Elmo shines out. The defenders, when they heard what was taking place in St. Angelo, were horrified, and immediately sent across to the Grand Master, begging him not to humiliate them in this manner. If he really wanted them to stay, they would do so, and die to the last man, but they had no intention of being replaced. Never would they be able to hold up their heads in the Order again if this happened.

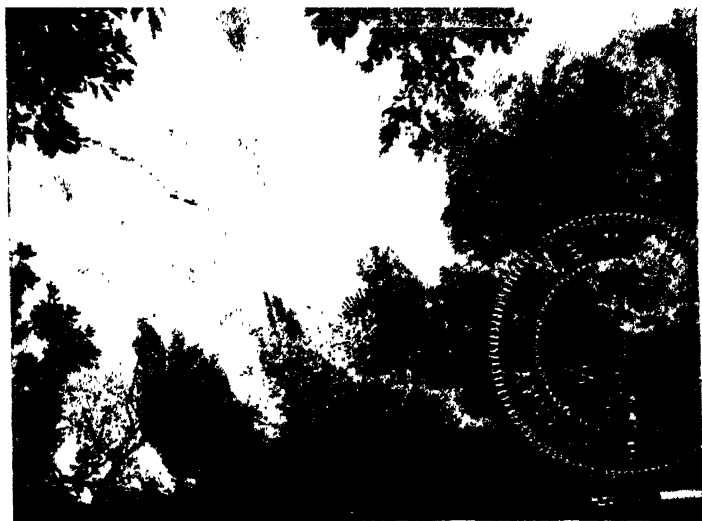
How easy it is to picture that band of distraught men, torn with doubts, haggard and weary-eyed, and knowing that they were doomed to die.

La Vallette turned a deaf ear to their pleading, and sent a letter saying that they would be relieved that night. It was a cruel and sarcastic piece of work, and it drove the defenders into a frenzy. Again they sent a frantic message to the Grand Master, imploring to be allowed to remain. This time La Valette realized that he had gone far enough in sternness, and merely sent over a few picked reinforcements.

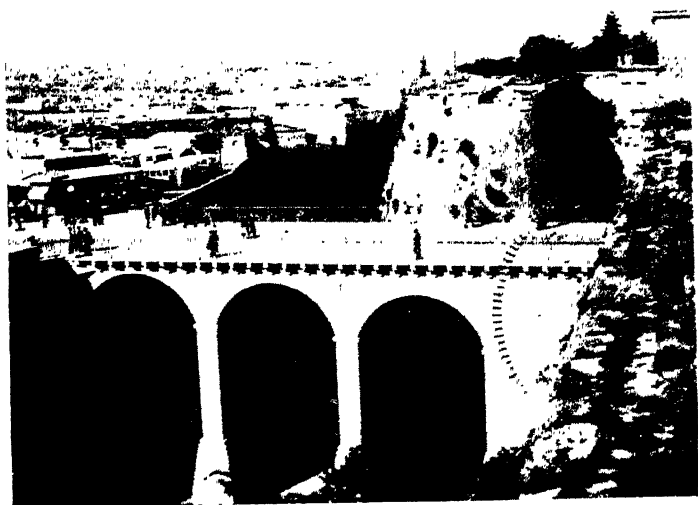
In St. Elmo things had gone from bad to worse, where guns pounded the ruins, not only from the land, but from the sea, and also from what is now Tigne Point. The bombardment rose to a crescendo, and a grand assault was made on June 16. The enemy, however, did not have it all his own way, for the guns of St. Angelo did great work. The dense masses of enemy poured forward to meet a glorious and a fanatical defence, where the breaches in the walls and ditches became choked with the dead and dying. When swords were snapped, or lost, combatants drew their daggers and, locked together, rolled down the steep piles of rubble.

This is what Prescott says when describing the assault ; and his language is vivid in the extreme :

A body of Turks, penetrating into the fosse, raised their ladders against these walls, which still stood, and, pushed forward by their comrades in the rear, endeavoured to force an ascent under a plunging fire of musketry from the garrison. Fragments of rock, logs of wood, ponderous iron shot, were rolled over the parapet mingled with combustibles and hand-grenades which, exploding as they descended, shattered the ladders and hurled the mangled bodies of the assailants on the rocky bottom of the ditch. In this contest one invention proved of singular use to the besieged. It was furnished them by La Valette and consisted of an iron hoop bound with cloth steeped in nitre (or brandy) and bituminous substances, which, when ignited, burned with inextinguishable fury. These hoops thrown on to the assailants enclosed them in their

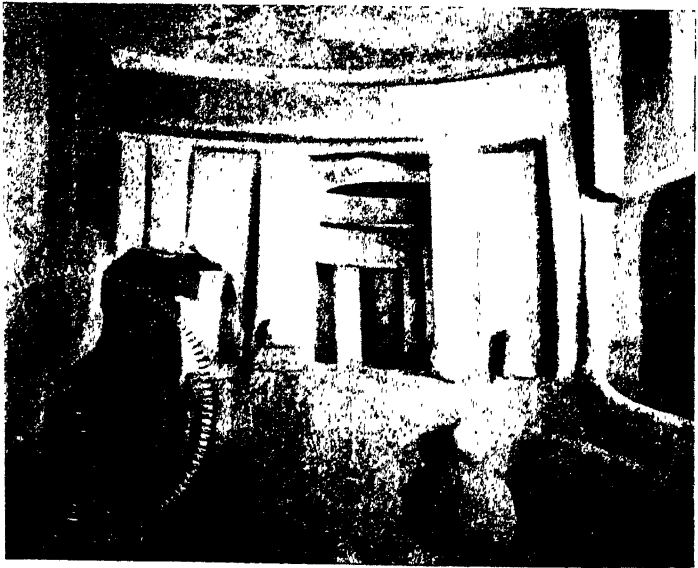
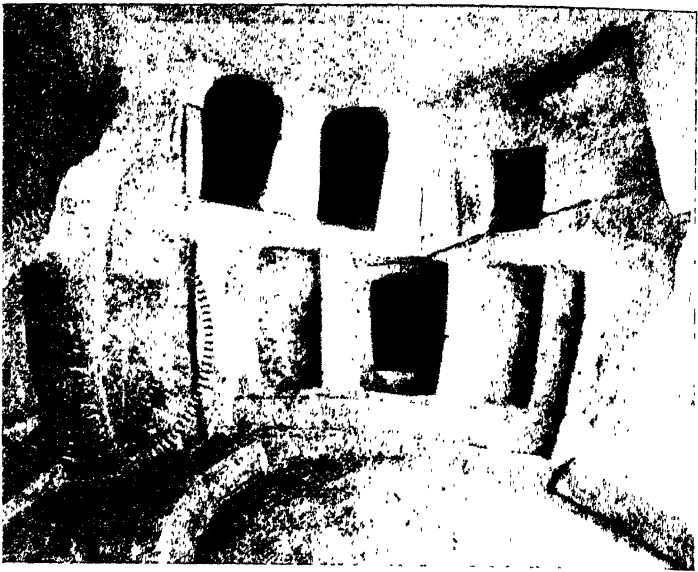


This gives some idea of the height of the bastions which encircle Valletta.



THE GREAT MOAT

The bridge leads to the main gate of Valletta which is the Porte Reale.



Scenes from the great underground temple in Malta. This temple was hewn out of the solid rock, *without* cutting tools, by a Stone Age people.

fiery circles. Sometimes two were thus imprisoned in the same hoop, and, as the flowing dress of the Turks favoured the conflagration, they were speedily wrapped in a blaze which scorched them severely, if it did not burn them to death.

Thus the battle raged and the whole circuit of the port was studded with fire. A din of hideous noises rose in the air—the roar of cannon, the hissing of fiery missiles, the crash of falling masonry, the shrieks of the dying, and, high above all, the fierce cries of those who struggled for mastery. To add to the tumult, a spark falling into the magazine of the fort blew it up with a tremendous explosion.

The fighting lasted well on into the morning, and so heroic was the defence, and so hot and exhausted did the Turk become, that he was forced to retire. Those gallant defenders inside St. Elmo now licked their wounds, and it is said that not one man remained uninjured. The badly wounded and the sick were sent across to St. Angelo by night.

One of the astonishing things about this siege is the stupidity of the Turks in allowing the two forts to have free access to each other. Dragut, however, soon stopped that by carrying the trenches to the edge of the Grand Harbour, and in these he placed guns which commanded the points of disembarkation. He then proceeded almost to surround the fort ; but whilst engaged upon this work he was struck behind the right ear by a

fragment of rock and, bleeding profusely, fell down in a faint. He eventually died.

That night the enemy kept the defenders awake and harassed by continual false alarms and feint attacks. Weary and hopeless, the long hours were spent by the Knights in prayer or attending to the sick. By the 18th the fort was entirely cut off from the outside world, and all hope of life was abandoned by the defenders.

On the 22nd, after a prolonged and final bombardment, an assault was made. Three times the flower of the Turkish Army was repulsed by the gradually weakening defenders, until finally, incredible as it may sound, Mustapha Pasha was forced to realize that he would have to wait yet another day before he could grasp his prize.

The courage displayed by that pitiful little band of survivors reads like highly romantic fiction, and so exhausted were they that they could not walk, but only drag themselves along the crumbling ramparts.

The night of the 22nd-23rd was spent by the survivors in the tiny chapel in the fort. The end, everyone knew, must come with the dawn. One further effort, however, had been made to obtain relief. A Maltese soldier swam across the harbour, mainly under water, and delivered a despairing message to La Valette, but it was too late.

At dawn, the garrison took up its station to await the end. Several badly wounded knights had themselves carried, sword in hand, to where they could sit and die fighting. One aged knight, whose legs were shattered, was placed on a stone with his two-handed sword, and he is said to have killed several Turks before he was cut down in the final scene. The end came, and six Maltese soldiers escaped by jumping into the sea and swimming away. Every other living soul died, weapon in hand.

In due course the clear morning light showed the anxious watchers in St. Angelo a Turkish standard floating above the smoking ruins of St. Elmo.

Mustapha Pasha cut off the heads of the dead knights in St. Elmo and mutilated their bodies. These he tied to rafts which floated across to St. Angelo. La Valette was so infuriated by this that he had the heads of the Turkish prisoners cut off and fired from his guns into the enemy camp. From thence onwards no quarter was given on either side.

One hundred and thirty Knights and about 1400 Christians died to defend St. Elmo, but the price paid by the Turk was 8000 of his best troops and a month of time. This is what La Valette said to the Knights after St. Elmo had fallen :

What could a true knight desire more ardently than to die in arms? And what could be more fitting fate for a member of the Order of St. John than to lay down his life in defence of his faith? Both of these precious boons have been vouchsafed to our brethren; why then should we mourn for them? Rather we should rejoice at the prospect of the glorious futurity which they have earned. They have gained a martyr's crown, and will reap a martyr's reward. Why, too, should we be dismayed because the Moslem has at length succeeded in planting his accursed standard on the ruined battlements of St. Elmo? Have we not taught him a lesson which must strike dismay throughout his whole camp? If poor, weak, insignificant St. Elmo were able to withstand his most powerful efforts for upwards a month, how can he expect to succeed against the stronger works and the more numerous garrison of the Borgo? With us must be victory.

II

The great hospital, built in 1575, which lines one of the walls facing the main harbour, must be one of the longest single rooms in the world. It is nearly 520 feet in length and held 300 beds.

The Order, being pioneers in hospital nursing from the very beginning, spent much time and money on this hospital. It was regarded as a marvel by all Europe, being run and administered on lines very far in advance of anything that was then known or carried out elsewhere. For example, each patient had a bed to himself, a thing unthought

of in other hospitals, where a dying, a sick, and a diseased person often shared the same bed. Each bed was made with fresh sheets every evening, and those which became soiled were given to the poor. The walls were hung with woollen curtains for extra warmth in winter, and each bed had an alcove beside it in which was kept a commode, or its equivalent.

Three surgeons and three doctors were always in attendance, and one of each actually lived in the building for a month at a time. There were also six "Barberoti", who were young medical students, as well as a dispenser and five assistants. The doctors were bound to visit each patient at least twice a day, and at the head of each bed there was a bed-card on which were written details of the illness and its treatment.

The vast building had three floors ; the upper for the better types of patients, the middle for soldiers, and the lower for the slaves. It is curious how long the idea persisted that fresh air and sunshine were harmful in sickness. No one appeared able to differentiate between airiness and draughts. In the upper ward of the Knights' hospital the windows were small and high up in the walls, to keep out the supposedly harmful sea breezes. The unfortunate slaves suffered under conditions not unlike that found in an ordinary

cellar. What this ward must have been like after a hot summer's night defies description.

Here are a few interesting details concerning the hospital. There were twenty small wards for special cases, such as dysentery, surgical, and infectious diseases. The average number of patients was four hundred, but as many as a thousand were treated at one time. Deserted children were admitted, and every year seven girls were settled in marriage with dowries.

The Knights were expected, and even forced, to attend the hospital at regular intervals, where they tended the patients, as was done in the old, old days in Jerusalem. The Grand Master went each Friday, and helped to feed and wash the sick. There are some quaint old prints still in existence showing a Grand Master performing these duties. Silver plate and cutlery were in use in the hospital.

The dangerously ill were fed upon vegetables, chickens, and eggs, whilst the less sick were given meat, rabbit, and vegetables. A curious rule was enforced which read, "Dice, chess, and the reading of the chronicle and histories and other nuisance, are forbidden as disturbing to the blood."

The fame of this hospital spread all over Southern Europe, and patients flocked to Malta from Sicily, Italy, and other near-by countries.

No sick person, of whatever religion, was refused admission ; but there is no doubt left in the mind that the Knights tried hard to make converts from those they tended.

The out-patients were very numerous, and were given medicines, kept in huge, highly decorated pottery jars, many of which can still be seen in Malta. A district-nursing system was also carried on, which visited the sick in the outlying districts.

This great work of charity, which cost huge sums of money each year, went steadily forward through the period of decadence, and it was a light which kept burning brightly almost to the end. Those who think only of those sad years before the final collapse would do well to study this side of the Knights' work before they utter sweeping condemnations.

The hospital today is the headquarters of the Malta Police, as well as a police-barracks. The great main ward is divided into two by a low wall : one half is used as a garage and the other as a drill-hall. The middle ward is a stable for police-horses, and is the pride of the force, and the envy of all those who deal, or have dealt, with horses. It must be one of the cleanest and best-appointed stables belonging to a public body in the world. The smaller wards are now offices or barrack-rooms, but much still remains which is of interest.

III

One hot afternoon I was taken down to the Grand Harbour, put on a ferry, and taken across to the Borgo where the Knights first lived when they came to the island. It now consists of a maze of narrow streets, hot, airless, and somewhat smelly. In one of these was a large building, whose exterior gave no clue to the interest which lay within. This was the Inquisitor's palace, and a grim place it turned out to be. Whilst being shown over the great rooms, and wandering down the numerous passages, even I could sense the horrors of the past, for here lived what were a part of the most intolerant set of people the world has ever known.

The Knights of St. John, who were always at loggerheads with someone or other, had a more than usually bitter row with the Bishop of Malta, with the result that the Pope in Rome sent over an Inquisitor to arbitrate. He took up his residence in this palace and became a veritable Old Man of the Sea to the Order ; a continual torment to them.

Not only did this man try to interfere with the administration of the Knights, but, what was far worse, he reported to Rome all the shortcomings and private scandals of the Order, and there were many. He gradually became, in fact, something

between a mother-in-law and an inspector of public morals.

To everyone's consternation, he stuck like a limpet, and no Grand Master of the Order was able to get rid of the office, which remained until the very end.

I was shown the fearful dungeons, the execution platform, and the torture-chambers, and over everything hung a frightful air of depression and gloom, so that I was thankful to get out once again into the clear sunlight.

IV

In Valletta today there are still seven of the great auberges left, and it was in these houses that the Order lived in a manner similar to that in our public schools.

The most well-known is the Auberge de Provence, which is now the Union Club. A comparison between the old and the new is not without interest, and you are led to wonder what the shades of those Knights of Provence think of things as they are today.

The interior, in the old days, consisted of numerous bare dormitories, but in the great common room, which is now the dining-room, the walls were hung with tapestries, armour, and the loot

collected from a hundred affrays with the Turks. It was here that meals were taken, and guests entertained, and the walls are still decorated with elaborate mural designs.

The day in the Auberge de Provence began with Matins at midnight, followed by Lauds at 1 a.m., after which everyone returned to bed until Prime at 7 a.m. After this later service the Knights washed themselves and had breakfast, or *Mixtus*, of bread and wine. Then followed *Missa Familiaris*, at which attendance was optional. Morning Mass took place somewhere about eight-thirty and was followed by a break of an hour, during which the Knights got together and talked about anything of interest, but mainly these discussions turned on local politics in the Order. High Mass began at ten, whilst dinner was at eleven and held in silence.

The afternoons were given up to work, recreation, and military exercises. The Knights were forced to attend at least three afternoons for gymnastics, wrestling, drills, and shooting with the cross-bow. After this was over, a Knight might occupy himself as he pleased until vespers. Then came a reading, supper, and a general retirement to the hard and virtuous couches, or so we are led to believe.

Perhaps the shades of these Knights are not so

shocked at what goes on in their home today as we might be led to believe, for we read that continuous prayers and masses became tiresome, and the young and high-spirited Knights had to find some other outlet for their energies. Roistering in the streets of Valletta ; throwing stones ; baiting the Inquisitor as he rode by in his carriage ; dressing up as women ; and breaking into the houses of the local Maltese in search of the citizen's wife were but a few of their misdoings.

The auberge today is the Union Club, which is a Service one, and jealously guarded against the entrance of those considered to be undesirables by the autocratic committee. I have no love for this club, to which I was forced to pay what for me was the large sum of six pounds entrance fee. I can at least say, without treading on toes known to have corns on them, that it was not worth it.

The Great Common Room of the Knights is now the dining-room, and at certain times of the year it is turned into a splendid ballroom. The many smaller rooms, which you suppose were dormitories, are now used as card, billiard, and reading-rooms, all of which are upstairs. The ground floor consists of a large hall, dressing-rooms, a bar, *and* the Snake Pit.

When I use a club abroad I do so for two main

reasons, firstly to get a drink and secondly to meet my men friends or acquaintances, and these are invariably found, at one time or another, in the bar. The bar of the Union Club is a disgrace to any club. It is far too small and cramped, the bar itself is one of the most unlovely things I have seen, and finally, when it is crowded, the atmosphere resembles a London fog.

For a junior member to air a grievance is regarded as an act of insubordination by the committee, and he is told so quite plainly. Having suffered, I know. That off my mind, let us turn to the more interesting Snake Pit. This, as the name implies, is the women's side of the club, and it is also known by other vulgar names, such as the Hen Roost, the Hag Hole, or the Parrot Cage. It is here that the reputations of people like myself are not enhanced; rather do they become frayed and torn.

Where Knights once prayed and fasted, sailors', soldiers', marines', and Air Force wives, in their gay dresses, drop in during the morning or afternoon for a rest and a drink after the fatigues of shopping. Here deadly enemies greet each other with sweet smiles and soft endearments, and gossip drifts about the room. It is woe to the unfortunate male who offends the leader, or semi-leader, of his own particular circle, for he will most surely be thrown

into this pit, and the poison will wither his list of acquaintances.

How the long-dead Knights must smile as they listen, for they also were great gossipers, and ever ready to pick a quarrel.

The following auberges are still to be seen, and permission to look over them can be obtained without much difficulty.

The Auberge de Castille. This was the most modern and ornate of them all. It lies behind the Opera House and is now the headquarters of the Malta Command. It was finished in 1744.

The Auberge de Provence was built in 1575 and is in the main street, Strada Reale. It is now the Union Club. It, like most of them, has an ugly exterior.

The Auberge d'Auvergne was built in 1574 and is also in the main street. It is now the Law Courts and police-offices, and little of its old glory remains.

The Auberge de France was built in 1588 and is in Strada Mezzodi. Is of little present-day interest.

The Auberge d'Italie was built in 1574 and is opposite the post-office in Strada Mecanti. It is of considerable interest, being now a very fine museum.

The Auberge d'Aragon, built in 1571, is the

smallest and is closed. It lies tucked away near St. Paul's Cathedral.

The Auberge de Baviere is unimportant, and is now a Government school.

The eighth auberge was demolished in 1838 and was the Auberge d'Allemagne.

Most of these auberges were designed by the famous Maltese architect, Gerolama Cassar.

v

As was natural, the life of the Order circled about the palace, where, as the end grew nearer, the pomp and circumstance which surrounded the Grand Master closely resembled that of a petty German state before the war. The Grand Masters now took rank and precedence before every prince in Christendom who was not a crowned head.

The palace, from very humble beginnings, grew and grew until it has become what it is now. The great chapter-hall, reception-rooms, and galleries are covered in frescoes, the walls hung in rich brocades, and it was here that the Grand Master administered his vast organization. With valuable estates in seven different countries, court intrigues, wars, alarms, maladministration of priories, and the fickle temperaments of princes, to say nothing of the Pope, life for the old men who

lived in this palace was not all that historians try to make it out to be. It is no wonder they often went out to one of the numerous country palaces, leaving their cares behind as they hunted or relaxed amid the charming gardens.

It is true that the Grand Masters did live like princes ; with Chamberlains, Masters of the Horse, Seneschals-in-charge, Masters of the Robes, and twenty knights and forty officers employed about the palace on various duties, as well as innumerable servants, they certainly wielded the power of princes. The pity of it was that those who ruled in the palace, and gathered power into their hands, were generally too old to exercise it properly. The rule in the Order appeared to be to elect as old a man as possible, so that there would be frequent changes, and the hands on the reins unlikely to use the curb. One is, of course, speaking of the later days in Malta.

Today the palace is the seat of government, the official residence of the Governor, and a museum. Now and again the Governor gives a dance, and the chapter-hall, which is now the ballroom, once more awakens. Women in butterfly-like dresses and men in splendid uniforms glide over the smooth floor to the sounds of a subdued band. In the long, armoured-filled galleries, and state apartments, are the sitting-out places ; and something of the old

magnificence comes back to those who sit beneath the huge chandeliers, and are frowned down upon by the old Masters who line the walls.

From the roof of the palace there is a most superb view of all the harbours. The figures which strike the hours on the great clock facing one of the courtyards in the palace are said to have been brought from Rhodes. Some of the frescoes, if one knows where to look, are not at all what one would expect to find in the home of a religious body ; and especially one which eschewed the other sex.

CHAPTER IX

THE MALTESE IN OUTLINE

I

It has almost come to be an accepted fact, during recent years, that the Maltese are a race apart, having little in common with other Europeans. The Maltese, naturally, have encouraged this belief, which, however, has little truth behind it. In essentials the Maltese are no different from any other Latin or southern peoples, either in looks, stature, colouring, or other racial characteristics. Their language, as has been said, is certainly not European, and it is upon this that the Maltese base their claims.

Those with whom the average Briton comes into contact are shopkeepers, car-drivers, policemen, and servants of all kinds. If not judged entirely by our standards, they are good fellows. Like most southerners, the Maltese are inclined to be easy-going where work is concerned, and to put off until some other time what could be done today. Go to a carpenter, a tailor, or a bootmaker, and they

faithfully promise that the article you want fashioned will be ready in, say, a week's time. You quickly come to realize that the week really means a fortnight or more. Raging inquiries may extract expressions of regret, but nothing more.

The Maltese are very religious, and the Church of Rome is all-powerful, as many a man has found when he came up against her. The parish priest is a very king in his own country, for does he not hold in his grasp the power to damn a man for all eternity? He is, fortunately, often a man of the world, who not only gives spiritual guidance, but much more material advice to his flock, and, as his word is law, it can be readily seen what an influence for good or bad he can be with those who do not think for themselves.

The standard of living among the poor, of which there are many, is very, very low—so low that the average Briton has no conception of it. He may wander down some of the back streets of Valletta, where the tall houses are packed with families, and the household laundry hung across the street; where the children play in the gutters, and the full-blown wife chats from her door-way. But they do this in all great cities. Unless you enter the houses, it is not possible to judge how the occupants live. In the villages, the houses, from the outside, give an impression of affluence, for the stone, being cheap

and easily worked, is used lavishly, and in consequence is misleading.

If only the Church would recognize some mild form of birth-control on this little island, how much happier and contented would be her children. The infant mortality is very high. What God gives He takes away, and the parents are thankful.

The average Maltese is cheerful and fond of sport in his own way ; and he keeps his animals in excellent condition. It is rare to see an underfed horse, or an ill-kept goat, but whether this is because the authorities keep an eye on him, or comes from his own thoughtfulness, I am not sure ; perhaps it is a combination of both.

They make excellent seamen, and it is one of the sights of the place to see one of the boats which ply between Valletta and Gozo ploughing its way through a heavy sea, and being handled with great skill.

Local industry is limited by a lack of soil and raw material, most of the agricultural produce being used by the inhabitants. Lace-making and the weaving of a pleasant, extremely hard-wearing cloth are the only industries which can strictly be called local. During the past year, however, a pipe-making factory has been started, and is said to

be doing very well. The lace-making and the weaving is, naturally, done by the women, and in their own homes. The lace can be very beautiful, and absurdly cheap, when the amount of labour involved is considered.

The Maltese women, in youth, can be very attractive, but, like most southerners, they quickly become plump, if not actually fat. Some of the lower-class women, however, are shapeless tubs to look at. Among the upper classes the women are very smart and intelligent people, who can leave many of our Service wives very far behind in looks and dress.

I had, during my time on the island, several cases of men wishing to marry Maltese girls. I strongly discouraged this practice, not because I did not think they would make good wives, but because I know there were many English girls who would make better ones. In several instances I was worsted, for these girls employed tactics not unknown at home, which, expressed in barrack-room terms, invariably graphic, is known as "being allowed to sample the goods".

The Maltese are very superstitious and, being deeply religious as well, many of their legends and omens are connected with it. The Devil is a very real person to them, and ever on the look-out to snatch a soul, or to besmirch it. Like many

another people, they consider that the Evil One and his servants, hate sudden and violent noises of any kind, and so on feast days petards are shot off into the air to make Devil-alarming bangs high overhead.

Each church has two clocks; one tells the time and the other is a dummy, the idea being that the Devil is so stupid that he will not be able to know the correct time and so prevent the faithful from attending Mass.

The evil eye is a terrible thing, and to be guarded against at all times and in all places. The index finger and second finger spread apart, and pointed at a person suspected of owning this horror, is to ward it off. And so, if you are pointed at in this manner, you may consider yourself well and truly insulted.

When I first arrived in Malta I was much startled and amused by the strange behaviour of a large and grubby peasant woman. She got into the same bus as the one I was in, sat down opposite to me, stared me straight in the face, turned away her head, and crossed herself. I heard later that there was nothing personal in regard to myself in this act, as most Maltese do this when about to start on a journey of any kind.

Some of their customs are not without interest. On a child's first birthday it is offered a flat basket

containing the following : an ink-pot, a crucifix, a sword, as well as other things. According to which it touches, so will that be the career for which it is destined. The same idea might be adopted at home, when it would save many a parent much mental strain in later years.

Among the old-fashioned, Maltese marriages are still arranged, and especially with the upper classes. On betrothal the man offers his bride-to-be a fish with a ring in its mouth, whilst the respective mothers make a paste of salt, honey, and aniseed, which they rub on the bride's lips to make her affable and prudent. Presents from friends and relatives are then dropped in the sitting bride's lap. These latter customs are now only carried out by the country folk and lower classes.

One or two other quaint rules are as follows : You must not eat cabbage on New Year's Day ; no child must be absent from the house on St. Martin's Day : if this is allowed to happen, bad luck will come to the house. A cure for fright was to give the patient a plate of soup, and, after it had been eaten, to tell him that it had been made from a dead puppy. An infallible cure, I should think. Yawning will let a devil in, if you are not very careful.

II

The Maltese aristocracy is sharply divided between the real old nobility, whose titles date back into the dim and distant past, and were granted by kings and princes in a manner similar to our own, and those who have been given papal or other inferior titles, whose holders take part in business of all kinds. No real noble is permitted to earn his living, to trade, or, in fact, carry out any commercial undertaking whatsoever ; and they will have nothing to do, socially, with those of their class that do so. One of my Maltese friends, who owns six old and very honourable titles, is very poor indeed, having lost his heritage by misfortune. He is quite unable to do anything about retrieving it.

The real aristocrats are widely read, travelled, intelligent, and highly educated men and women of the world, whose friendship is sincere, and whose hospitality is unpremeditated and unstinted. They live in vast houses, or palaces, which are filled with priceless furniture, splendid pictures, and the most intriguing engravings ; each is, in fact, a museum on its own.

Their acquaintance and friendship is not easy to gain, for they, naturally, will not tolerate our

tiresome service-insularity and our complete disregard for everything which is not English. It is an extraordinary trait in our make-up that we, as a race, can rarely be brought to see that it is possible for people and things not our own to be as good, if not better. Foreigners who do not know us very well, and who have not grasped this kink, can be driven by it to a point of madness ; that is, if they do not laugh.

CHAPTER X

A SCENTED JOURNEY

I

THE flesh-pots of London were calling and I would hie me home to my native land. But how should I go? Several possibilities presented themselves, but narrowed down considerably when the expense was considered. There were one or more of His Majesty's warships to choose from, but that would mean spending much of my time in a stuffy ward-room, surrounded by gin and illustrated papers at least a week old, for it is not permitted really to take your ease upon the spotless decks of a large warship. If the ship was a small one, and the sea rough, I should most certainly be sick, and the hardly veiled contempt in the eyes of the ministering marine servant would be more than I could bear. I once endured that, and never again. There were transports, but, as the reader already knows, I have no love for these accursed forms of sea conveyance.

In the local newspapers there was an advertisement which stated that a French company ran a

small cargo-ship, called the *Henri Estier*, between Marseilles and Valletta. The ship in question carried a small number of passengers in great comfort, but what attracted my attention was the fact that she called at Tunis and Bastia in Corsica, and could drop me at Nice. Never having been to any of these places, I decided that this was a heaven-sent opportunity to do so.

As is usual in my case whenever I propose to set out on a sea voyage, the sea rose up in fury and the wind whistled its disapproval. In this instance, however, these demonstrations of Nature were premature, and by the time the date of sailing arrived the elements had calmed down somewhat, but not before giving me several days of unpleasant apprehension.

A cab conveyed me, my batman, and baggage down to the customs house, where we embarked in a *dhaisa* for the *Henri Estier*, which was lying at anchor in the harbour not far away. The batman, when the ship was pointed out to him, was deeply scandalized and expressed surprise that I, of all people, should be travelling in such a ship. I must say I was a little shaken myself when I saw her, but, like so many other things in life, her interior was much better than the outward appearance.

Striding up the gangway with the dignified calm I reserve for embarkations, I received a nasty rebuff

at the top. A large Maltese policeman demanded to see my passport. I found it after a frantic search in my attaché-case ; he opened it, scanned it, and blandly informed me that I could not be allowed to board the ship. Surprised and angry, I demanded to know why.

“You have no pass, sir,” he replied. “You must return to the customs house and get the police authorities to stamp your passport.”

And back I had to go, fuming with rage, to where a policeman used a rubber stamp which stated that I had permission to leave the island. A hurried return to the ship, which was hooting mournfully, a hasty farewell to the faithful batman, who had not yet fully recovered from his shocked condition, the gangway was hauled up and we slid out into the open sea. Tunis and all it held was before me.

My cabin was small, but comfortable, as was the saloon-cum-dining-room-cum-smoking-room ; but the House of Meditation—the least said about that the better. The bath, I discovered later, was supplied with hot water in a manner new to me. A steward filled it with cold water and then turned on a small steam jet let into the side, low down. This, in due course, certainly heated the water, but it also left behind a vile smell of oil, always nauseating to me.

After unpacking, and an amiable little steward of unguessable nationality had given me weak tea and biscuits, I went on the upper deck, which was the size of an ordinary dance-floor in a London restaurant. Here I found the large French captain, who greeted me politely, but without warmth. He was very busy and, fascinated, I watched his activities. He appeared to have bursts of frenzy, when he, a carpenter, and a small white dog all strived together to tear his cabin to pieces. Unable to curb my curiosity, and not really believing he was doing what he appeared to be, I inquired concerning the matter. I was told that his bunk was not comfortable and that he was putting in a fresh one. The small white dog objected to my presence, and said so. Chided by the captain, it promptly went and hung its head through the rails, and said to the waves what it thought of me and my smell.

There was one other passenger, a woman, but as she had her meals at odd hours I only caught glimpses of her exotic presence. At dinner, quite a good meal of the French kind, I sat alone, whilst the captain and his first officer, sitting at a table opposite, conversed in rapid bursts of quite unintelligible French, ate hugely with deep satisfaction, and watched my actions when they thought I was not looking.

The following morning was clear and lovely,

and the African coast loomed up as we entered the Gulf of Tunis. When visiting, by sea, a port which is new to me I always form a mental picture of what it will be like, but never do these efforts conform in the very least to the real thing. Tunis was a startling exception, for not only did it not fit into my picture, but it was not there to do so. Steaming down the Gulf towards a distant shore, I could see some wireless-masts and a large group of palms, but no city, or anything that might be one.

We approached a small seaside resort, with a bathing-beach hut, and a modern township behind. Entering a narrow piece of water, there were several landing-stages to be seen, but these we scorned, and, pushing ahead, soon had the township behind us. I began to wonder what was going to happen and where we were going, when suddenly we rounded a sharp bend to enter a canal which ran for seven miles into the far-distant palm trees. Moving at a slow pace, we glided down this water with its low banks and wide, placid lakes on either side of us. The colour of the canal on which we floated was a rich pea-green in colour, and it creamed revoltingly against the sides of the banks in our wake.

Mile after mile slid by, but there was still no sign of that large and important city of Tunis.

That it must be in palm trees I knew, but how it managed to hide itself so effectively I had still to find out.

It gradually took shape, however, in the form of warehouses and berthing-places where the canal ended by opening out into a small basin. There were several other ships here, and the *Henri Estier*, like all her kind, flirted with each of them in turn as she sidled this way and that, edging towards her own berth. Apprehensive heads appeared over the stern of the nearest ship to us, and I thought for a moment that we were going to hit her ; but no, we slipped away and the heads vanished.

The docks of Tunis are like any others the world over, being strewn with bales, bundles, and boxes, crates, cranes, and customs people, but here there were fezes under which were dark faces and broad grins. The roads leading towards the city might have been those in any large French port, being lined with small cafés, offices, and warehouses, between which the trams crashed. How the French adore trams, and the noisier they are the better they like them. Our stately, quiet London tramcars must be a source of bewilderment to the French tourist.

Walking in the direction of what I hoped was the centre of the city, I suddenly came out on to a really

splendid boulevard, whose middle was planted with gardens gay with flowers and lined with tall palms and other trees, under which children, loungers, and other passers of time wandered to and fro.

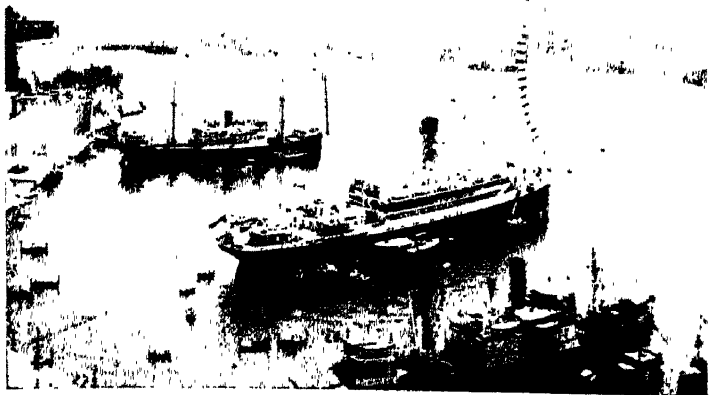
During my stay in Tunis I must have walked up and down this boulevard many times, and it never failed to be interesting. Rarely have I seen such a varied and colourful crowd of people as used its paths and pavements. French officers in their gay uniforms, colonial troops, equally gay and smart in their uniforms of unusual design, few of which appeared to be similar to any other, and lovely ladies, lots and lots of them, many of whom looked as if they were what the Americans so graphically call "Red-Hot Mommas". There were, of course, hordes of French business men, who invariably look so smug, and, finally, the North African himself, made up of Moors, Arabs, Berbers, Turks, and Tunisians. Many of these might have come straight off the stage of a musical comedy, with their bright, gaudy, flowing robes, brilliant headgear, and gold-mounted and bejewelled daggers. Swarms of motor-cars, all honking, tore up and down, people hurried to and fro, and there was an air of gaiety abroad, even at three o'clock in the afternoon.

As is my usual practice when staying for more

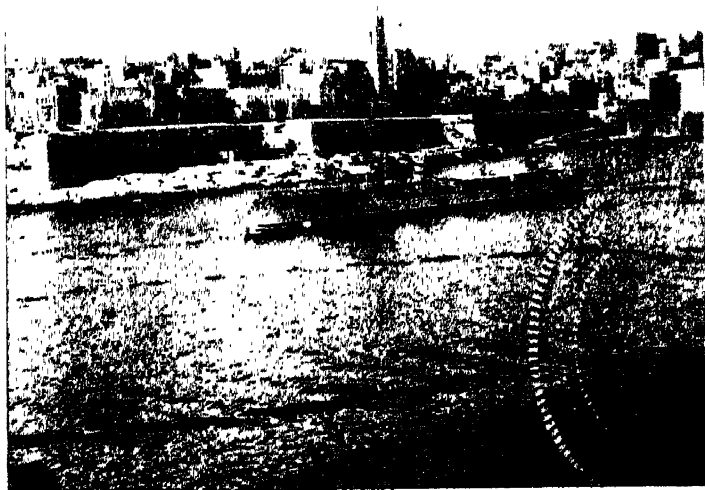
than a few hours in a foreign port, I sought out the British Consul to make myself known to him. The advantage of this is twofold. If I were unfortunate enough to get into trouble of any kind he would know who I was, where I had come from, and where I was going ; and secondly, he was in a position to tell me what to see, and how to set about it. The Consul had his office at the far end of the boulevard, which was a very long one. He was gracious and most helpful, telling me all that I wished to know, even down to where I could get good food, inexpensively, and the form of entertainment most likely to appeal. "Wise is he who knows his own Consul." This should be printed on all passports.

The Consul strongly advised me to visit the bazaars, which he said would surprise me. They certainly did so, and I, who am used to such places in other parts of the world, and have no illusions regarding them, was astounded. Generally they are dark, smelly, dirty, and filled with those whose sole aim in life is to ravish your pocket as easily and expeditiously as possible. In Tunis the bazaars are clean, airy, not unduly smelly (it was certainly winter), and only one person accosted me with success.

Shops, large and small, lined the narrow alleys which rose to a small hill at the back of the city, and in them were fascinating things, and even I,



Looking towards the entrance to the Grand Harbour at Valletta.



A destroyer leaving Marsamuscetto Harbour.



THE FALDETTA

This is a form of Maltese national dress which is slowly being allowed to die out.

sophisticated as I am, was tempted more than once by attractive leather-work, lovely old carpets, and strange curios. For a long time I wandered up and down these alleys, peering in here, and stopping to look at this or that, and no one implored me to buy anything. I even entered one or two shops, and was able to retire empty-handed and without difficulty. I was, however, to meet with a crushing defeat, and it happened in this manner.

I came to a scent-shop, where the variety of odours coming from it were so numerous that I stopped to investigate. A smooth-voiced, smooth-haired young person appeared and cooed at me. Would I honour him by entering? I did. Would I take coffee? I would not. Then would I care to sniff his more exotic, and rare perfumes? At this point, a boy friend who had been sitting in the shop arose and faded away. Obediently I sniffed, and exotic was the right word. Never in the whole of my life have I smelled such violent scents—scents which pushed you backwards, took a hold of your windpipe and closed it.

I must have become hypnotized, because later I found myself agreeing to buy a small bottle of rich brown liquid.

“Most exquisite; most rare,” cooed the salesman in my ear. “It will fill the female heart with rapture and passion. This one which you buy is

very rare. It is made of civet cat, ambergris, and musk. No woman can resist it." Before I could stop him, he had dabbed a drop on the back of my hand. I sniffed it and promptly sneezed.

The salesman grinned broadly. "You must remember that it is sixty times concentrated. When diluted it is celestial," he said.

Still dazed, I found myself accepting the foul stuff and handing over the equivalent of ten shillings in French money. I then departed hastily, smelling like all the harems of the East. The accursed dab of scent on my hand refused to disperse. I rubbed it, moistened a handkerchief and used it, but that only seemed to make it worse, and the smell clung with a damnable and highly embarrassing tenacity. A dozen times during the remainder of the day I washed my hands, but it remained like the spot on Lady Macbeth's hand.

When I returned to the ship I stowed the bottle deep in a suit-case, where in due course I was surprised to find a strange scent among my belongings—that of Freesia, which is not at all unpleasant ; but how my liquid managed to change its smell on diffusion I do not know. But the young man had not lied in this respect.

Many days afterwards, in England, I remembered the scent and decided to test its powers of ravishment on a young woman. Beyond admitting that

it was decidedly powerful, she showed no signs of falling into my arms. In fact, she sprang away from me so suddenly that a few drops were spilled on to the carpet. That room could not be used for several hours afterwards. I still have the bottle, and some of its contents, which I am willing to sell at a price. A few moments ago I sought it out and smelled it again in the hope that I might be able to describe it. But no—can one describe the taste of a strawberry? By the way, I hope a customs official does not read this, for I suppose I should have paid duty on it, but it lay forgotten deep in a case.

It is curious how a scent can recall a person, or a place, far more vividly than anything else. That bottle, just now, brought Tunis and the funny little shop into my brain with startling clarity.

From the bazaars I went to a café for a drink, and received what I thought were queer looks from the waiter as he leaned forward to take my order; even in France only certain men go about smelling as I did. After an excellent dinner I went off to an arcade mentioned by the Consul which opened out into a large central hall, on the far side of which were steps leading up to a huge cinema. There were many tables and chairs dotted about, and an orchestra was playing to a crowded audience.

Picking my table I sat down, ordered my drink,

and prepared to be amused by the scene. A French colonial café is always interesting, and sometimes exciting.

In the middle of this animated scene was the captain of the *Henri Estier*. I beckoned for him to come over and join me, but he smiled and shook his head. The reason appeared in a few moments in the form of a very lovely lady. Tall, dark, and vampish, her face was a pure oval, and her eyes huge and sloe-like; and she did not seem so much to walk as to insinuate herself down the floor of the hall. She smiled in a ravishing manner as she greeted the captain, who did not even bother to get up from his seat when she appeared on the scene. He moved his hat from a chair and she sat down, apparently well content, for he was a very good-looking man, in the French style. I watched them and smiled to myself as I wondered what would have happened if I had introduced such a creature in the Sliema Club on a Saturday night. A riot, undoubtedly.

The performance in the cinema was dull and I walked back to the ship and my bed. Entering the docks I nearly came to grief, for, on coming round the end of one of the large tin sheds, I came face to face with an outsize specimen in bulls; there were, in fact, two of them. The nearest bull was standing up and he eyed me with hostility, and his snort of

rage was disconcerting, to say the least of it. I skipped lightly backwards and sideways, and went upon my way, but with more than one glance behind to see if the tethering-rope still held, for the bovine snorts and shufflings showed the bull was considerably agitated. To be chased round and round Tunis docks late at night by an infuriated bull would be as undignified as it would be unusual. It did occur to me that perhaps it was the effect of the scent which had raised the bull's passion, for I was still in a highly scented condition, but I dismissed this on remembering that, when in India, no bull or cow could stand the sight of me, and many was the time I had been forced to leap lightly over a hedge or up a near-by tree.

II

The ship was sailing at four-thirty the following afternoon, and so I rose early and set out to visit Carthage and Sidi bu Said, both of which lay on the coast beyond the seaside resort we had passed on entering the canal. An electric train took me first of all to Sidi bu Said, on the side of a steep hill beyond ancient Carthage. The Consul told me that I must see this place, it being a model Arab village and the pride of the district. He did not exaggerate.

A steep, rough roadway brought me to the

village, and a very clean and charming one it was, which would have filled any artist's heart with joy. Steep, narrow streets, spotlessly clean, led upwards between fascinating houses. Each was snow-white, actually so, and every window-frame and door-way was painted a bright, clear blue, and the combination of this with the strong sunlight was startling, but most pleasing. Many of the windows also had intricately designed and blue-painted iron grillwork over them and their balconies.

Not one of the alleys was straight for more than a few yards, and many led to tiny squares, or fascinating courtyards, each a picture in itself. I could easily imagine an artist tearing up and down this village in a frenzy as he tried to make up his mind upon which vista to begin.

The Arabs I passed in the streets were faintly hostile and, I know, made rude remarks concerning my person to each other. Why this should have been so I do not know, but the cats were friendly enough, using my legs as rubbing-posts.

From the top of the 500-foot hill there was a magnificent view on all sides, and it was possible to gain some idea of the huge size of Carthage when looking down upon its numerous hills and grass-covered hummocks. What an awful thing must have been the sack and destruction of this city! The Arabs did their work well, for there is little

left above the ground, as the reader will learn.

Another train took me back to the station of Carthage, which stands in the middle of the ruins, the railway line cutting straight through them. No sooner did I step off the train and put foot outside the station than I was set upon by a horde of guides. Cursed and attentive as a cloud of mosquitoes, they tried to sell me postcards and the services of their disgusting selves. I fled down a wide road leading towards the sea and was thus able to shake off most of them ; but one clung to me. He gave up at last.

On the shore, lapped by small waves of clear sea-water, were the remains of what was once a truly massive sea-wall, built of material closely resembling concrete, and some little distance out from the shore remains of jetties could be seen.

Carthage was built somewhere about 822 B.C. by those great colonizers the Phoenicians, and finally destroyed by the Arabs in A.D. 698. Most of us know something of how wealthy and powerful this city became in its heyday, how it fared during the Punic wars, was destroyed and rebuilt by Rome, and how it once held over half a million people. Little remains above ground but a number of rounded hillocks, looking for all the world like an English golf course in their green covering of short grass.

Turning to the left along the shore, and a little distance inland from it, I came across odd fragments : a room here, a cellar there, a bath, or some unrecognizable portion of a house. Not far from the sea quite a large temple has been dug out of the ground, and it is in a fair state of preservation considering its age and the savage methods employed in the final destruction of the city. Still further inland, and on a small hill, whole streets have been uncovered, and most interesting they are, showing that almost modern drainage systems and road-planning were known in those days.

I walked for miles over these ruins where there was nothing but the buried past beneath my feet, and the clear, glorious sky above my head, where a warm sun and an invigorating breeze made you feel that it was good to be alive. There was not a sound of any kind, and yet I tried hard to hear the steady hum which once must have been heard where I walked. Quite suddenly I came upon the amphitheatre, which is the best preserved of all the ruins, but it was here that I was stricken.

That morning I had eaten a very light breakfast of the usual coffee and rolls, and since that time had walked many miles, up hill and down, in the clear fresh air. The result of this was that quite suddenly I felt that I had no inside at all, just an aching void instead. It came so suddenly that I

was taken unawares. The hotel, noted beforehand, was on the top of a high hill on the far side of a valley; that I reached it as soon as possible became imperative.

I left the arena in a hurry, and close to the exit came upon an aged man sitting on a hoary piece of carved stone where he was charming snakes which squirmed at his feet. Not even this unexpected sight slowed down my questing feet, and the thin cry from the reed-pipe followed me down the road.

Could I find a path leading up to that hotel? No, I could not; and the large building sat on the top of that hill and leered at me, whilst I felt I could chew the leather of my shoes. With increasing despair I continued to search, and so, leaping lightly over private walls and tearing through gardens, I came out just below the hotel. Dashing inside, I grabbed a waiter, who thought I was demented, and demanded an omelette, a very, very large omelette, one the size of a meat-dish, and it had to be produced at once. He grinned and went off to give the order, whilst I, armed with a glass and a bottle of German beer, went out on to a verandah where there was a superb view. Not then in a condition to appreciate it, I gnawed some dry bread and drank my beer.

The eventual omelette was entirely satisfying. To starve to death must be an awful thing.

The hotel stood several hundred feet above the surrounding country and looked down to where the small neat gardens and bungalows of modern Carthage cover the old, but how the occupants ever do any gardening I do not know, for the ground is just a mass of broken bricks and remains of masonry. Across the shimmering Gulf of Tunis, the distant hills were purple and blue, and Tunis itself was a vague blur of green. In many respects this place was not unlike the Italian Riviera, and as I sat enjoying the charm about me I thought how enjoyable it would be to spend several weeks in this place. It would make an ideal spot for a honeymoon couple.

Below where I sat was a piece of waste ground through which the ancient remains of a house reared its head. Here a young cow-herd lay at ease whilst two young heifers extracted exquisite pleasure from scratching themselves against the aged piles from the dead city. A sedate donkey grazed near-by, and its foal gambolled like a lamb in spring, butting its mother and teasing the heifers.

The time came for me to leave, and I had to tear myself away, for I must not be late for the ship. A horrible thought occurred to me that my watch might have stopped, and that I should see the ship gliding down the canal, leaving me behind. But

this was unfounded, and I returned to the docks to be greeted by a truly amazing scene.

III

A large crowd had gathered about the gangway of the *Henri Estier*, and on the dockside near-by were curious assortments of animals, including pigs—hundreds of them—cows, bulls, horses, donkeys, sheep, and crates of fowls. Each animal in its own particular way proclaimed to the world at large how much it deplored its present environment.

I went aboard to find that all the animals, including the pigs, were destined to come into the ship. The fore well-deck was already crowded with horses and cows, and more were being hoisted high into the air to be lowered on to the strange, slippery iron ; but it was the aft well-deck that fascinated me, for here undoubtedly the pigs were going. The deck was being hastily divided up into a number of pens by means of odd boards and planks, and the first two pens, one on either side of the hatches, now being ready, the first consignment of pigs was shooed into position. A runway, consisting of barrels and odd crates, was made at the bottom of the passengers' gangway, which led to the aft well-deck, and was neither very long nor very steep.

The first group of swine, about thirty, were well behaved and came aboard with only a few squeaks. Herded by two men with sticks, they were guided into the runway, and here they promptly scuttled up the gangway to be led to their pens. The second consignment also came aboard without fuss, except that one pig did nip another in front with deplorable vocal results. About sixty large, pink, hairy pigs were now in their pens, which they did not like, and said so.

In company with the small woolly dog, I leaned over the rails of the upper deck and watched the unusual scene below. My companion, however, did not care for pigs, in fact he strongly resented their presence, and in view of what followed I do not blame him. He probably had experienced them before on that ship, and knew what to expect.

Biting, scrambling, slipping, grunting, and squealing like shrill train-whistles, a continual stream of pigs now came aboard, and the more that arrived the noisier did they become. Few people, I should imagine, have heard close upon a hundred hogs grunting and squealing in unison—an appalling experience.

Then two rebels appeared on the scene, two large, hairy, pink, grunting rebels, who would have nothing to do with the runway. They charged the empty casks and crates, bowled them over, scattered

the crowd of onlookers, and escaped. The crowd was highly entertained and watched an infuriated swine-herd dash off in pursuit. Five minutes later he appeared, dragging one of the pigs by a large right ear, whilst an assistant clung to the left. From the noise it made, you would have thought that pig was being slowly tortured to death. Its screams of protest were blood-curdling, and as it tried to bite one of its captors, he promptly beat it with a stick, which made the din worse.

Dragged to the gangway, the rebel was prodded up it and, tumbling on aboard, was sent to join its companions, where it promptly vented its rage by biting and nipping everything in reach of its snapping jaws. The howl of protests which arose was deafening. The second truant came more quietly.

Gradually every inch of the aft well-deck had some portion of pig upon it, and altogether there must have been about one hundred and fifty of them in the various pens. On the hatches were now stowed the fowls, canaries, and a few sheep.

In due course we slid away from the wharf and our journey to Bastia in Corsica began. Gliding once again down the canal, we had an astonishing sunset as a send-off and farewell to Tunis. It was thoroughly vulgar. We most of us know those violently coloured postcards which are produced for our inspection in the East and which depict

puce, crimson, and flaming sunsets, with apricot coloured upper skies over water incredibly blue. Well, that was our sunset, and I would not have believed it possible had I not seen with my own eyes. It was so stark, so crude, and so blatant.

In the middle of the night I woke in my bunk to find the ship was heaving in a most unpleasant manner, so that I was continually rolling from one side to the other, and my legs were also often higher than my head. I lay and thought of those unfortunate animals on deck, for not only must they be feeling seasick, but cold and drenched with rain. I fell asleep again, but at eight o'clock the steward brought in my tea, and I sat up to find the ship was still dancing about, but not so badly as she had been. With the steward came not only the tea, but a curious and vaguely familiar smell. It was, in fact, far more than a smell, it was an awful odour, which for the moment I could not place. No, it was not the scent from my bottle, but something far more deadly. Then I remembered. It was the concentrated perfume of unclean pig. Woe ; now I knew I should be seasick without any shadow of doubt.

By nine o'clock the ship had steadied down so much that I felt quite able to get up. I sought the bath-room, which was next door to the aft well-deck, but I was forced to retreat hurriedly, the

smell of pig there being almost tangible, and that, combined with the oily bath-water, would have been more than I could have borne.

On deck I felt better. A glance down into the well-deck showed every pig flat on its side, but none of them seemed the worse for the unpleasant night. Pigs spend so much of their lives being uncomfortable that I suppose it did not matter to them.

The further north we went the calmer became the sea, but the weather was filthy, with heavy squalls of rain and low scudding clouds. Every now and again, however, there were glimpses through the mists of the green mountainous coast-line of Sardinia.

We arrived at Bastia early the next morning to find it a small port, nestling on the coast under the shadow of wild, high hills, against which the low clouds threw themselves, to be torn and dispersed. I hurried ashore, glad to be away from that accursed ship and its smell, and the air of Bastia was, to me, that of a sweet-scented garden.

The port is obviously a very ancient one, and in the old portion of the town, which lies at the end opposite to the modern harbour, there are some fascinating tall buildings and steep, stepped streets leading down towards a tiny harbour directly beneath the fortress. Apart from the old-world charm, there was little of interest, and so I wandered

up a very steep hill and went into the fortress, which is now a barracks. Here I found a French colonial battalion carrying out its parades and drills, which to me were of absorbing interest.

The men, in fatigue dress, were not, I realized, looking their best, and they stood in large circles in the middle of which was an officer and an N.C.O.

I watched and was fascinated. The men only seemed vaguely interested in what was being taught them and found me far more diverting. They eyed me, winked, leered, and grinned at me in a friendly way, and I was forced to move from group to group, without undue pauses, for my presence obviously interfered with the drills in question. In one circle was a beautiful young officer, who was what might be termed, in modern slang, a gorgeous person, and, when he saw me watching, preened himself in an absurd manner. He then started to show off. Unfortunately I giggled, and he caught me doing so.

Having exhausted the interests of the fort, I wandered back into the town, which was decidedly dull, and, not wishing to return so early to the boat for luncheon, was forced to walk along a coastal road of much weariness. The only thing that caught my eye was the unusual colour of the rocks at sea-level, which were a bright olive green.

After luncheon I climbed the hills at the back

of the town and found myself in a strange, wild country, full of sombre grandeur, where the hill-sides rushed upwards in a series of ledges made of a black, loose kind of shale, out of which grew pine, fir, and larch trees. Perched upon what looked like a pinnacle of rock, far away above my head, was a small church and a monastery. I made this my goal, but never reached it because the going was too rough and exhausting for me. I did, however, suddenly come upon a valley of wondrous and surprising loveliness.

This valley burst upon my view when I had climbed over many loose stones and an impossibly steep ridge, but it was worth the effort. Winding up from the sea in gigantic green curves, a foaming mountain-stream tore down its bed, and dotted up and down the steep sides were tiny farmsteads, surrounded by huge green trees and small fields of rich soil.

Far away, at the head of the valley, and just below where the billowing clouds were being torn apart, was a village whose houses closely resembled a cluster of swallows' nests. Somewhere, far below where I stood, a girl was singing as she worked in a field, and her thin voice rose up and might have been that of a fairy at my feet, so diminished in volume was it.

The whole scene bore a remarkable resemblance

to those lovely valleys in the foot-hills of northern India, and it clearly showed how splendid must be the scenery in the middle of Corsica. A strong, virile land, full of natural violence, hardship, and crude poverty.

From the clear, sparkling air of that mountain-side I returned once again to the foulness of that swine-infested ship. All my life, until I lose consciousness during the last hours, the smell, or sight, of a pig will remind me of the *Henri Estier*.

We set sail for Nice in the late afternoon and, sitting on deck near the captain's cabin, I longed for someone to talk to about what I had seen. There was no one but the white woolly dog, for the captain could speak only a few sentences of halting English, and I even less in French. I am now going to air a grievance, because I considered it at the time of which I am writing.

Not ten feet away was the captain, a man I knew that I could like, but was definitely barred from seeking his acquaintance as effectively as if we had both been dumb. It was all wrong, definitely wrong, and this kind of thing is so well known that it can almost be called a platitude to mention it. All right, if that is so, why does not someone do something about it?

Every sane man or woman of any intellect wishes humanity to reach one of its highest goals.

That of the Brotherhood of Man and "Peace on Earth and Goodwill to Men" is the greatest message of hope in this life the world has ever known, and yet it still remains a seed, unwatered and uncared for. Why? If the reader compares the position of nation to nation, to that of the French captain and myself, he will find the answer. My not saying unpleasant things about the pigs, seeing that I did not disturb his afternoon rest, and offering him a cigarette did nothing towards making us become friendly. Cannot the same thing be applied to nations? The only thing which would have enabled me to become friendly with that man was to be able to talk to him, all of which leads me to that curious thing the League of Nations.

This was to have brought peace to the world; in my humble opinion it has done the reverse, the reason being because it has missed a vital truth. It had galloped before it could crawl. Before you can hope for peace and goodwill between either men or nations you must have individual intercourse. The main contact between nations today is by way of that dreadful fellow the politician. Until you are able to grasp a stranger's point of view, hear of his difficulties, sympathize with him, laugh with him, and live with him, you cannot become friends. This can only be done by

personal contact, and the first step towards that is speech.

Why in the name of all that is sane did not the nations at Geneva realize this in the beginning? A common language of some kind should have been sought and made compulsory in all schools, and then, in time, a Frenchman, a German, an Italian, and a Briton would have been able to talk together over their bocks, or beers, and so become friends, when fears, hostilities, and misunderstandings would fade away.

I have talked with men who manage world affairs and they agree with me that what I have said is true, but they always end up with a very large "but". I maintain that there are no "buts" and no difficulties which could possibly stand in the way, if a real desire lay behind. Mutual confidence. How often we hear those words today, and how absurd they are, and, what is more, the politicians know it.

I lay in my chair on the *Henri Estier* and thought of these things, and I longed to be a man capable of making people see this point of view. Disturbed, I arose, went below, and drank a brandy-and-soda alone, when I should have been sharing one with the captain.

The following morning we arrived at Nice and

I fled from the boat. I have nothing against the ship itself, which was comfortable, nor against the officers, but the reader knows how I felt, or at least he should do by this time. I wonder what happened to those pigs?

In all my wandering I seem to have missed the French Riviera, and now at last I was on the famous stretch of coast. I wondered if it would prove to be yet another illusion. Nice certainly was. The driver of the taxi which I engaged to take me away from the docks was a bad man, with whom I had a furious row when he insisted on trying to make me stay in an hotel of his own choosing. In the end he went to the hotel I wished to enter, where I called him a filthy cabbage, and we parted with other mutual vituperations and scowls.

Nice has a long main street—it is very long indeed—and I walked down its whole length to seek out the famous promenade, with its rank and fashion which are so often paraded before us in the English papers. On this sea-front, which closely resembled the one at Brighton, all I saw were invalids, cripples, a party of French cyclists playing football on the shore, and some very, very curious women, one of whom was sixty and yet dressed as if she were twenty-five.

After a good but very expensive lunch, I left

for Monte Carlo by a motor-bus. I did not enjoy the drive along the lower road, for it was hideous, where the lovely scenery was ravished by brutal and vile modern houses, shops, and hotels which lined most of the route. Most people know what it feels like to come upon a tin shanty advertising teas and cigarettes which has been dumped down on a beauty spot. Such is the road to Monte Carlo from Nice.

Monte Carlo is vulgar, frankly and blatantly so, and can be placed in the same class as Blackpool or Southend. Before going there I did not realize how comparatively small the place is, and also that the famous gardens in front of the Casino are tiny and set at a steep angle. The view, however, of Monaco seen from the terrace of the Casino is charming, where you look across the tiny harbour to the State perched high up on its neck of land.

I feel that I am expected to expand upon the Casino, but am unable to do so—it being boring and stupid. After the usual formalities I was allowed into the place and wandered into the large, artificially lighted rooms, which were fairly well crowded, but with an incredibly dull and dowdy set of people. Where were the jewels, the courtesans, the rank and fashion? I did not know, but I learned later that I should have gone

to the Sporting Club if I wished to see such things.

One man, however, did attract my attention, in fact he fascinated me. He was seated at one of the most expensive tables and might have been a young man in the City. He was gambling in the most reckless fashion, throwing his counters about the table without any particular method. He did not even remain on any one set of numbers, and, as a result, he lost and lost, and smoked more and more cigarettes, until I began to wonder if he had a revolver in his pocket. He showed little signs of emotion, and each time he lost five hundred or so francs he lit another cigarette and pulled more counters from his pocket. I must have watched him, at various times, for at least three-quarters of an hour, and not once did I see him win more than a small fraction of his losses. I suppose he got a thrill out of it, but the business thoroughly mystified me. Could it be possible that he actually liked losing money? If so many like making it, then, as there must always be opposites, some must like throwing it away.

I can well imagine that Monte Carlo could be thoroughly amusing if you were staying in a large villa near by, surrounded by wealthy friends, but to a casual visitor like myself its attractions were dimmed by the truly awful expense. The cost of

my simple tea in a large, ornate hotel shocked me.

The drive back in the late evening to Nice was not without charm, for the twinkling lights spread out along the coast were diamonds in an onyx setting. During dinner in the hotel I happened to notice a couple seated not far away from my table. The man was a middle-aged and obviously well-to-do French business man. He wore a neat imperial and was dressed as for a wedding. He was large, as was his wife, but it was not so much they themselves that caught my notice, but rather what they ate. Enormous platefuls of soup were followed by a gigantic lobster, upon whose tail followed numerous dishes of meats whose substance I could only guess at. Each course was devoured with such complete satisfaction that I was raised to unusual heights of envy. O that I could so enjoy my food !

When each dish and plate was well cleaned it was removed, and the man sat back and wiped his beard with a gourmet's appreciation. They were still munching sweetmeats when I left the room after a deliberately prolonged meal. Happy couple.

The following morning the train left for Paris at 9.17 a.m. and arrived at 11.35 p.m. that night. Thoroughly bored and exhausted, I was hurtled

across Paris to tumble into bed in a station hotel where I could not sleep. Called at 7 a.m., I arrived in London that afternoon a partial wreck. Journeys of this kind do not suit my make-up, unless carried out in comfortable sleeping-cars.

CHAPTER XI

ENDING UP

MOST of us know someone who has been, is, or will be in Malta, and, in consequence, I end with what I hope will be useful information to those who may, in the future, consider visiting the island.

A word of warning first of all. Do not go for a stay of less than a month, unless you know at least one person. If you are entirely unknown, it will take at least a fortnight to get your muzzle into the social trough. Should you, however, merely wish to see the sights, then a week is ample, and in that case go and be polite to the assistant curator of the museum, who will be pleased to see you and most helpful, for he is the pleasant young man of whom I have spoken.

One more warning. Visiting friends in this place is a highly dangerous proceeding, and fraught with traps for the feet of the unwary. You will be, most surely, led to drink far more than you usually do ; to stay up too late at night ; to dance until

your feet do not seem to belong to your body, and introduced to so many people that any attempt to remember their names, or who they are, will drive you insane ; but you will have a jolly good time, all the same.

There are various ways of getting to and from the island. The cheapest is by means of the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line, who charge just under ten pounds for a week at sea. Their food is good, but very plain, and you have to endure a forest of aspidistras in the dining-saloon. Apart from this it is not particularly uncomfortable, and the boats are steady. The next cheapest journey is the P. and O. Branch Line, and both these shipping companies run a monthly service. Many people go home by way of Sicily. This is interesting if you do not know Italy, but the journey is a long and tiresome one. Train journeys of this kind, without sleepers, make a complete wreck of me, and it takes several days to recover. The best route, either out or homewards, is by the P. and O. Mail Line to Marseilles, and thence by train or aeroplane, but this is expensive. If you are, or were, of any of the three Services, it is often possible to get a free ride in what we know as "Grey Funnel", i.e. a warship. But do not pick upon a destroyer, for they, in a rough sea, can gambol like lambs in spring.

The climate in Malta cannot, at any time of year, be described as trying. During the summer it is hot, but not unduly so, and now and again a damp wind blows from the African coast, but it is not nearly as bad as some people would have you believe, and it lasts but a day or two at the most. In winter there are short spells when the Gregale blows. This can be most unpleasant, with high winds and driving rain, but here again it is soon over and the sun shines.

The best season is from October until about the middle of April. Then there are clear, lovely days of cool bracing weather, when the sun shines brilliantly for many hours each day. The summer months are hot and dry, but even to those not used to the semi-tropics it is not unpleasant, and the bathing is worth what little discomfort there is. The climate is suitable for children of all ages, the whole year round.

Houses and flats have already been discussed. There are many hotels, but none can be called first-class. The larger of those in Sliema are more modern than those in Valletta. Their prices, especially in Sliema, are very modest for a stay of any length. A new hotel is to be built, but when it will be ready I do not know, but the island has been promised something super in this line. Several

ladies take guests into their pleasant houses, and introduce them socially.

Prices all round are much less, except for certain articles of clothing, than they are at home, and it is possible to live quietly, in great comfort, on quite modest incomes. Being among one's own people, you do not feel exiled.

Much of the social life has been reviewed, but I will add that art, music, gardening, sea-fishing, and first-rate opera are to be had. A resident of any social standing can easily become a member of all the clubs which, individually, are not expensive.

There is one cathedral and several English churches, as well as those of other denominations. The roads in the country are very fair, and cars cheap to run, petrol costing half what it does in England. There are many garages and a few of them good. It is best to bring out your own car, for those on the island are expensive and often aged in the extreme. Motor-buses run all over the island and are used by every class. There are several banks, good doctors, dentists, etc., and I have never before seen so many chemist shops in one place.

I will end on a less serious, but none the less important, note. Malta is the best of the marriage markets. I will not elaborate upon this theme,

having done so elsewhere, but if it is remembered that some of the most eligible bachelors the home country possesses are living temporarily monastic lives on Malta, the point has been made.

THE END

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